

A STUDY AND CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT OF SELF:
CHRISTIAN, HINDU AND PSYCHOLOGICAL

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Doctor of Religion

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Dedicated To
Marilyn, Lysbeth, and Ben - my family
the Oxherd
Jack, Howard, John, Frank - my teachers
Jeffrey
and
Ted
all of whom have touched my journey

jeffrey

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PREFACE

MY PERSONAL SEARCH

The oxherdsman becomes determined to find his true nature. He searches for the ox; that is, he resolves to persist single-mindedly until he finds his true self. The moment he begins the path to look for his ox, he leaves the path, for he is, indeed, the ox. He is seeking, but at the same time that he is seeking, he is also being sought. He studies and begins to understand intellectually that the one nature of all beings is the Buddha nature. As he perceives conceptually, he is said to find the traces of the ox.

When his thinking and acting are one, one large accomplishment for a person, he is described as finding the ox. He catches it only when he is able to see the nature of the heart down to its ultimate ground. He trains long and hard now, for he still hangs on to praise, to blame, and to worldly passions.

Excited to have found his ox, he now must liberate himself from the attachment to this happiness. He is liberated as he thus tames the ox, becoming pure unity, needing neither the self nor training any longer, just as no rein is needed for the tamed ox.

The struggle is over; man and ox are at peace. Peace is celebrated as the tune of great peace dances out

from the flute. The man is aware of the truth. Now, he must forget even the truth.

The ox vanishes; man is alone. He has no worries, no weariness. When he is hungry, he eats. When tired, he sleeps. He has broken into the realm of holiness.

But just as he forgot the truth, now he must forget the holiness. He becomes neither worldly nor holy. There is no self, no other.

The herdsman does not stop at this region of absolute not-ness. He proceeds to the great affirmation, the great "yes." Here he sees the mountain as mountain again. He appreciates red flower as red flower. Things are just as they are. He has returned to the original, everyday, worldly self, though he dwells coinstantaneously in the beyond. No matter where he is, he knows he is home.

Finally, he closes the door to his essential nature, allowing no one to enter. But, at the same time, he opens his heart and hands to whomever he may meet. He goes forth to the world, just as it is, in order to liberate others. Nothing magical is attempted. Nothing conspicuously moral or religious will be apparent. He looks very much the same as he did when he began, but things happen when he is near. Life blooms.¹

¹ Philip Kapleau, The Three Pillars of Zen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965); M. H. Trevor, The Ox and His Herdsman (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1969); and Daisetz Tertaro

It was this encounter with the Zen Oxherdsman that started me on my personal theoretical encounter with the search for self. I began concentrated searches experientially as I entered into growth groups and the Clinical Pastoral Education group. I attempted to be real, to be aware, to be honest, and to care.

I want to share my personal search before analyzing the search from the Western, Eastern, and Psychological viewpoints, for I want you to know where I am as I write, as I read, as I think, as I feel. I am sure that my personal search biases my presentation here. I would not wish it otherwise. My attempt will be to be aware of my biases and to let you, too, know those of which I am aware.

I am a twin. That is a most thrilling, enriching experience. It has been for us always one of joy. In the beginning of my teen years I began to ask who I was, as an individual. I was sad to observe that some people did not care whether I was myself or my sister. I cared to be myself. We have enjoyed developing our own unique identities and are now excited when someone observes that we are twins, but there was a time when Rollo May's observation of twins resonated with mine. He quotes:

Suzuki, Manual of Zen Buddhism (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

When you two go out walking, do you like to have the people on the street say, 'Look at these nice twins?' Immediately the little girl exclaimed, 'No, I want them to say, Look at these two different people!'²

Throughout my high school and college days I was attracted to interests which were seen to be, by society, more for boys than for girls: I enjoyed playing the French horn, took drafting rather than cooking, and majored in math in college. I was not consciously aware of any pain in this regard, felt somewhat amused by my entrance into these "masculine" fields, and enjoyed being surrounded by so many males! I was at this time also very supported by affirmation of my femininity. But I hurt and perhaps began my search for uniqueness as well as femininity when, as the only girl in the band, I was told to put my hair up, then heard announced at the stadium, "The Grant High School all male band!" I became interested in the ministry, but that was as much a female interest as a male interest in Religious Science.

My self-searching at that time was related to my professional goals. I wanted to be a math teacher, to inspire many who have been taught to hate math. But I reflected that a minister can reach the whole person. Soon after entering seminary, I realized the teacher reaches the whole person, too!

Getting older, and becoming impatient to marry, I

²Rollo May, Man's Search For Himself (New York: Norton, 1953).

began to ache about how to integrate the roles of wife, mother, minister, and individual all into one. I began to truly miss women friends. I experienced simultaneously a sense of joy in being the only Religious Scientist at the seminary, yet also a sense of alienation, for I was not even Christian, as I saw it. Taking communion was a huge step in my own self understanding. I affirmed that my faith was faith, and that since communion was verbalized to be openness to God, I decided to give of my faith and to be open to the faith of others. I felt integrity in my differentness.

The glory of ambiguity! I loved the possibilities for growth, openness, excitement, and understanding, but I also felt the pain of no tradition for support. I was my own theologian, I felt, and was left to discover myself!

Then I loved. A Christian. I learned what Christianity meant to him, and I resisted much of it. I grew, I opened. I challenged the importance of labels. If labels are unimportant, why, I asked, was I clinging to my rather ambiguous one? I became open to changing my label to Methodist, and simultaneously decided to marry. I am still feeling ambiguous. I am still me. I am still a twin. I still am in love with math and now even enjoy the taste of substitute teaching regularly. I am reaching graduation and feel myself to be a counselor-minister, open to challenges and hoping to be a hospital chaplain. I am

recently an aunt, becoming ever more attuned to the stirrings of motherhood in me. I am becoming a wife, too. The challenges I have searched for are folding into one. It is incredible, but it is happening.

Yet it is not incredible, for it happens to each individual. Some are more conscious of their inner stirrings than others. All selves seek to be found. That is my conviction.

Much of what I have written here of my personal search is the search for a role, but there is a deeper dimension - the search for the self includes the self's relationship to God. The spiritual search is more difficult to describe. I feel that this paper is an attempt at that, theoretically, but, for me, it brings me only to the phase of finding the "traces of the ox." Only when the teachings and theories have been moved beyond is the true self visible. Only when the search for self is forgotten can the self be truly expressed.

Forgetting the search does not mean that it should not be undertaken initially. It means moving beyond, not ignoring the search. Therefore, I know that the search for self is important for each individual and for our society, which is made up only of these selves.

Since I first wrote this personal search, my fiance and I have decided not to marry each other. The decision is based upon both our love for each other and

our rather different experiences as to our own relationship to God. I believe that God can be authentically experienced by different people in different ways. For our marriage however, which we had hoped to be a life of growth together in the experience of God and ministry to people, our differences have been the source of challenges which we have chosen to see as too big for us to meet together.

MY BIASES

I am aware that I treasure ambiguous lines between religions or diverse viewpoints. I am afraid neither of synthesis nor integration of these views. I find common elements easily in different views. It is more difficult for me to see clearly the conflicting aspects. It is my hope that in looking for them, I may recognize the incompatible elements in the views I discuss here.

I believe that most well-developed religions have some truth, and that some people can find their self within those religions. I do not believe in the revelations of complete truths. Therefore, I feel no necessity to swallow one religion whole. This may disturb those who insist that any dilution of the one view is leaving that view completely.

The fact that I do not come from either a Christian or Hindu background makes it easier for me not to want to cling to either one as superior, but more difficult to keep

in my mind the radical differences of the views. I am aware that, having been exposed to so much Christianity, I find much I wish to argue with in it. Having been exposed to less Hinduism, and having chosen what I want to expose myself to in Hinduism, I do not feel as much need to argue today. Religious Science, the religion in which I was raised, falls closer to the Hindu view of self in many respects than to the Christian view.

I am an optimist, which again is a large bias, and is an argument immediately with Niebuhr! However, I define my optimism differently. I consider myself optimistic because I believe that the search for self and for God leads somewhere. I also believe that there is enough common experience in persons that diverse religions, psychologies, and philosophies can dialogue successfully. I do not expect one absolutely correct view to emerge. I only hope to point out a possible healthy view of self which has considered these viewpoints.

I am biased to the view that my view is probably not the way it is. It is an attempt at truth. I believe that an argument can end with two people knowing where they are, without caring who is right or without attempting to agree. My attempt is not, then, to persuade you to agree, but to urge you to look.

I do hurt; that, I feel, qualifies me to feel both the need and the pain involved in the search. I do

rejoice; that, I feel, provides the impetus.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

I have attempted to write a "liberated" paper, using neuter terms whenever I could, or sharing pronouns between the two genders. This may appear clumsy. However, in attempting to do this, I have become aware of how difficult it is, of how I feel much more included in my own writing, and of how much there is a need for consciousness raising for people!

In this paper "self" refers to the total personality. I appreciate Jung's definitions of the "ego" as the center of the field of conscious consciousness and the "self" as the center of the total field of consciousness (including the unconscious).³ His definition closely aligns with my own as I wrote this paper. I did not really familiarize myself, however, with Jung's work until after the paper was written, so that I cannot honestly say his definition guided my work "self-consciously."

Primarily for the aid of the reader in minimizing boredom from repetition, I have used the words, "one," "person," "he," and "she" to be synonomous with "self."

It has become apparent to me that the word "in-

³C. G. Jung, Aion (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), p. 5.

finite" needs defining also. I mean it only in the sense that it is not finite, it does not end, but continues in some manner. I have not wanted to focus upon a time-oriented infinity in this paper, but I find that to be a truly plausible speculation. I prefer to focus on an infinity of "possibilities" and avenues of expression or creation. If it is possible to list all the possibilities, no matter how long that listing may take, the list is finite. If the possibilities never end, they are infinite.

There was a young man who said, "Though
It seems that I know that I know,
 What I would like to see
 Is the 'I' that knows 'me'
When I know that I know that I know."¹

¹Alan W. Watts, The Book (New York: Collier, 1966), p. 50.

CHAPTER I

THE CONTEMPORARY PREDICAMENT

A human being is faced with the challenge to be human - moreover, to be his or her unique self. In this contemporary, Western world, he is bedazzled by insights. Psychology influences him, the Christian understanding of self is still dominate for many people, and the Eastern religions have influenced Western writers and thinkers since the time of Emerson. Today a human is befuddled if he/she even attempts to state his/her challenge. Does he seek to become what he is, as Allport suggests? Does she try to reorganize, as Rogers would advocate? Or, maybe they will attempt to control their real selves, following Freud. No, he discovers Gestalt psychology, and he decides to simply be! Then he hears about Hindu thought, or Christian Science, and he discovers just being isn't quite the right approach; what he needs is to first become aware of his Real Self, then be that. She tries another direction - Christianity. Here she learns that her challenge is not to encourage her natural tendencies, but to confront those tendencies with the transforming power of the ideal man, Christ. Rebirth into a "new person" is her challenge. Oh, no, not when she goes to her women's consciousness raising group. There she learns the real challenge: to define herself!

Humans are searching to discover who they are, whether consciously and actively or passively, through the internal hungers of daily existence. Humans want to know who-what-why they are. Literature, both ancient and modern, support the presence of this quest. Recent cultural phenomena expose the problem in dramatic ways. Psychology asks these questions formally and has developed various schools according to the answers. Christianity has continuously re-focused the questions and re-answered them anew. Eastern religions have concurrently been exploring, through different paths, the same question.

If there is some value to the diversified insights, if any of these approaches can lead to health for the individual, then how is one to combine what he hears in his therapy session on Tuesday with what he sees on the golf course Wednesday and what he experiences in church on Sunday? The challenge has become not simply, "Who am I?" but "Which path towards discovering who I am will be for me?" He must know himself well enough to know which avenue toward self-fulfillment is for him!

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

If we agree that all people have a similar nature, it is interesting that some people reach their fulfillment through radical confrontation and others through radical encouragement, that some people experience themselves as

finite beings, separate from God, and others experience their beingness as infinite, one with God, that some people see goodness, while others see sinfulness as inherent in human nature.

Our purpose in this paper will be to find a theological view of the "self" which will take into consideration psychological insights of healthy growth.

This broad search is very important at this time, for several reasons. First, as psychologists argue among themselves, answers emerge which may or may not include the spiritual dimension of persons. It is necessary to include theologians in the discussion to be sure that the self which emerges is whole - does not lack its vertical dimension. Second, if the search is taken only in terms of the Western view of self, the incredible insights of the East are likely to be neglected. West and East provide the devil's advocate position for the other. This, it seems, strengthens both Eastern and Western views, regardless of whether one final view is agreed upon between the two. It strengthens the views because they are forced to deal with aspects which challenge basic assumptions.

The search for the self is valuable to every human being, for it gives meaning to our individual existence (in a time when meaninglessness is endemic) and gives an orientation for that existence.

We will focus this study upon three areas: How

is the concept of finitude and infinity related to the concept of self? What is the relation between self and God? and, Is the self considered fundamentally good and/or evil? It would be very exciting, as well as beneficial to a study of ethics and social action, to give attention to the social implications and ideas of the future which develop from these concepts of self. However, this has been eliminated for it would take an additional paper equal to this one to develop sufficiently.

What follows is a broad overview of the problem as seen in literature and cultural phenomena, a summary of psychological perceptions of the self, an Eastern overview, which focuses primarily on Advaita Vedanta Hinduism and, to a lesser extent, Zen, and finally a Christian view which is centered in Paul's anthropology and the views of current day Christian theologians, most of whom are process thinkers.

In chapter two, the view of Aurobindo Ghose, a contemporary Hindu who considers himself to be an Advaita Vedantist, will be dealt with in depth. Reinhold Niebuhr is the Christian spokesman for chapter three. These two theologians have been chosen because of their contemporaneity, their emphasis upon the self, their highly ethicized theology, and their use of traditional language from both East and West. Niebuhr is consistent with the Christian tradition, but he avoids the extremes, especially in his

affirmation of the goodness and sinfulness of humans. Aurobindo affirms Brahman and atman are one, as many Hindus, but he bridges the gap toward the West by maintaining an individual identity of self. This allows for at least some common ground in a discussion between the two.

Chapter four summarizes and critiques the two views, providing a basis for the feasibility of a healthy view, theologically and psychologically.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE
LOST SELF AND THE SEARCHING SELF
IN LITERATURE AND CULTURAL PHENOMENA

Socrates urged, "Know thyself."

For they say, "What am I? A poor miserable man, with my wretched bit of flesh." Wretched, indeed; but you possess something better than your "bit of flesh." Why then do you neglect that which is better, and why do you attach yourself to this?²

This conversation was constructed by the stoic philosopher who began as a slave boy in Rome and later became a courtier of Nero - Epictetus. His teaching followed Socrates, who thought man to be a kinsman to the gods. Epictetus ridiculed his fellowmen for thinking of themselves as if they "were only stomachs, and intestines, and shameful parts..."³

²Epictetus, The Discourses, Vol 12 (Chicago: Benton, 1952), p. 108.

³Ibid., p. 115.

In the East, one of the oldest and best known upanisads, the Chandogya Upanisad, had as its central teaching the basic doctrine of the identity of the atman, the psychical principle within the self, and the Brahman, the universal principle: "Tat Tvam asi" (That art thou).⁴

The Aitareya Upanisad asks the question, "Who is this one?" The answer: "We worship him as the Self." The following question and answer is, again, the basis of the Hindu teaching: "Which one is the Self?," "...Brahman..."⁵

These ancient quests continued throughout human history. Hamlet speaks for the questioning, feeling, experiencing person of all ages:

What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me; no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.⁶

What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time

⁴ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, A Source Book in Indian Philosophy (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 64, 67-70.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

⁶ William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 80.

Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.⁷

Iago speaks for Shakespeare in a more grandiose manner, but the perplexity of the human condition is both tragically and amusingly felt:

O villainous! I have looked upon the world for four times seven years; and since I could distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I never found a man that knew how to love himself. Ere I would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon.⁸

Dostoevsky portrays the struggle between the good and evil in a human:

Yes, man is broad, too broad, indeed. I'd have him still narrower....God and devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man.⁹

This struggle is usually experienced by humans as they suffer, rather than when they rejoice:

There's a terrible amount of suffering for man on earth, a terrible lot of trouble....I hardly think of anything but of that degraded man - ...I think about that man because I am that man myself...¹⁰

Melville, too, juxtaposes the noble god-likeness of a human with his meanness in expression:

⁷ Ibid., p. 131.

⁸ William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1958), p. 52.

⁹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamozov (Chicago: Benton, 1952), p. 54.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 53.

Men may seem detestable as joint-stock companies and nations; knaves, fools, and murderers there may be; men may have no mean and meagre faces; but man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature, that over any ignomious blemish in him all his fellows should run to throw their costliest robes...¹¹

More recently, the questions of goodness and meanness have been transformed into questions of meaninglessness and freedom for the human. K, in Kafka's, The Trial, felt guilty at the age of thirty because his life lacked meaning. Therefore, he submitted to society's attack upon him.¹²

Kafka's characters lost their identities. Some felt guilty for that; others merely submitted. A dead human does not worry about his identity. Camus was empathic: "Perhaps it was more painful to think of a guilty man than a dead one."¹³

Kafka's defeatist view of the human's freedom is summarized by the comment, "What a stupor had overcome him, merely because he had decided to conduct his own defense!"¹⁴ How different are Yossarian and Rabbit in Catch 22 and Rabbit Run respectively! They knew they

¹¹ Herman Melville, Moby Dick (Chicago, Benton, 1952), p. 84.

¹² Franz Kafka, The Trial (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).

¹³ Albert Camus, The Plague (New York: Modern Library, 1948), p. 276.

¹⁴ Kafka, op. cit., p. 166.

needed no defense. Free inside, they felt no need to prove themselves.¹⁵

Trueblood, in The Invisible Man, speaks the final word: "I ain't nobody but myself."¹⁶

The poet whose book The Prophet, is presently challenging the Bible in terms of sales speaks with the flavor of Eastern infinities and unities. His poem on self-knowledge reveals his concept of the infinite depth of humans and the unfolding character of the soul.

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights. But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge. You would know in words that which you have always known in thought. You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams. And it is well you should. The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea; and the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes. But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure; And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line. For self is a sea boundless and measureless. Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather, "I have found a truth." Say not, "I have found the path of the soul." Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path." For the soul walks upon all paths. The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed. The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.¹⁷

¹⁵Joseph Heller, Catch 22 (New York: Dell, 1951), and John Updike, Rabbit, Run (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett, 1970).

¹⁶Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York: New American Library, 1952), p. 63.

¹⁷Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet (New York: Knopf, 1944), pp. 60-61.

His concepts of unity between humans and the infinity of each human are beautifully shown in the following two meditative thoughts:

Should you really open your eyes and see, you would behold your image in all images. And should you open your ears and listen, you would hear your own voice in all voices.¹⁸

They say to me in their awakening, "You and the world you live in are but a grain of sand upon the infinite shore of an infinite sea." And in my dream I say to them, "I am the infinite sea, and all worlds are but grains of sand upon my shore."¹⁹

Although Gibran writes of the self above, he, like most who face the quest of self, concludes, "only once have I been made mute. It was when a man asked me, 'Who are you?'"²⁰

In literature throughout history the struggle for knowing who and what the self is, is apparent.

In our culture now, we experience even greater preoccupation with these questions, for several reasons. First, there is greater exposure to diverse cultures and subcultures, making apparent the various options for answers. The Eastern religions have influenced many Western individuals, not only directly, through Vedantism, Zen, and Eastern Mysticism, for example, but also indirectly in such

¹⁸Kahlil Gibran, Sand and Foam (New York: Knopf, 1967), p. 17.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 2.

²⁰Ibid.

ways as the New Thought Movement, Emerson, and popular poets like Gibran. Youth and some adults are creating "subcultures," living "unconventional" styles of life.²¹ Oftentimes the professed goal is to learn who one is as an individual apart from institutions. Often the discovery is a byproduct of the experience, rather than one of the sought after goals. This, in turn, initiates new questioning on the part of institutional-minded persons.

More leisure time is a second phenomenon which leads to preoccupation with the self questions. Leisure is a burden unless one knows who he is enough to enjoy being that self. Time for leisure allows one to move beyond subsistence living and gives a human time to think. When he thinks, he tends to ask who he is.

Another indication that people are now more concerned with discovering who they are is the mushrooming group movement. "Interpersonal groups represent a concern for the person."²² Casteel cites reductionism and the technological emphasis as causes for the depersonalization which has led to the need for a return to concern for persons. Reductionism tends to reduce a person to a few elementary components and then claim that that "is all

²¹John Casteel (ed.), The Creative Role of Interpersonal Groups in the Church Today (New York: Association Press, 1968), p. 22.

²²Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 21.

there is to man." Technology uses persons in ways and for purposes that tend to deny their essential humanity.²³

Rogers accounts for the quick spread of groups by pointing to two factors: the increasing dehumanization of our culture and the affluence which allows for sufficient attention to psychological wants.²⁴

Ours is an age of anxiety. Few question that. May writes that one of the few blessings of such an age is that we are forced to become aware of ourselves. He quickly adds, "I realize, of course, that this is not generally called a blessing."²⁵ He cites Kierkegaard:

To venture causes anxiety, but not to venture is to lose one's self....And to venture in the highest sense is precisely to become conscious of one's self.²⁶

Finally, the ambiguity with regard to roles in our contemporary situation leads, very often through frustration, to the search for the self. Several writers have commented upon this phenomenon and its consequences.

Glasser observes that a dependent role, which in previous times was well worth the struggle, looks only

²³Casteel, op. cit., pp. 21, 22.

²⁴Carl Rogers, Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 10.

²⁵Rollo May, Man's Search for Himself (New York: Norton, 1953), p.vii.

²⁶Ibid., p. x.

limited and unattractive to many youth today. He explains that for those in a "civilized identity society," there is now suddenly enough security so that an independent role is possible for almost everyone.²⁷ He sounds optimistic in this passage, but he also recognizes the pain and insecure feelings one often feels in trying to achieve his independent role.

Richardson, speaking about the American adolescent, remarks that he is responsible for choosing his specific adult identity (career, mate, sexual style). In traditional societies the adult identities are bestowed upon the youth from outside, not chosen by the youth for and by himself.²⁸

Emphasizing the changing roles within a family, Satire points out that, for the last generation of parents, the person's role was no longer "automatic, unquestioned, pre-determined by a static social order and by pre-arranged manners and customs."²⁹ The result of this ambiguity was that worth for the individual no longer seemed a birth-right; it had to be earned. Males and females were left

²⁷ William Glasser, The Identity Society (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 29.

²⁸ Hubert W. Richardson, Nun, Witch, Playmate: (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 117.

²⁹ Virginia Satir, Conjoint Family Therapy: (Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books, 1967), p. 23.

feeling both unimportant and confused.³⁰ An extra psychic load began to be placed upon the family, for the members of the family were called upon to make up for the anxiety and distress of the outside world through their affection and closeness.³¹

Expressed in down-to-earth terms, Margaret Holmes writes:

Oh, God, who am I? Where did I come from and where am I going? What am I doing here?....Sometimes, passing a mirror, I am startled by the stranger who seems to be wearing my face. Who is this person who looks like me (poor thing) and rushes around in my body?³²

Ambiguous role-fulfillment for males and females alike may have led initially to increased concern on the part of women for their own consciousness raising. Bardwick believes now that it is possible that the contemporary woman's revolution may be reflecting a larger sociological change.

It is not impossible that the women's revolution is the forerunner of a larger revolution in which men and women will experience both role freedom and the responsibilities that always accompany freedom.³³

She explains the various motives for women now.

³⁰Ibid. ³¹Ibid., p. 26.

³²Marjorie Holmes, Who am I, God? (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 3.

³³Judith M. Bardwick, Pyschology of Women (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 218.

The two primary motives are to maintain a feminine identity and to achieve a unique personhood identity, often related to a profession.

Role conflict, or the frustration of aspects of the self, does not exist unless diverse and conflicting motives have evolved.³⁴

Herbert Richardson, who does not from this author's perspective give empathetic attention to the female situation, does, nevertheless, speak of the changing roles in the interaction between the sexes. He proposes that there has been an evolution toward the unification of sex and love. The three elements bringing about this evolution are the self's voluntary self-transcendence, the individuation of men and women, and the eroticization of society.³⁵ He argues that "woman was flesh, man was spirit....She had her fulfillment through her children, man had his fulfillment through his work."³⁶ Now, since it is assumed that men are no longer thought to be incapable of controlling sexual lust and that women are no longer thought to be unable to resist a male, that is, since it is assumed persons are thought to be consciously voluntary in their behavior, the "concomitant assumption will be that men and

³⁴Ibid., p. 155.

³⁵Richardson, op. cit., p. 3.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 80-81.

women are in principle, able to be related on the basis of equality in all aspects of community life..."³⁷

Men and women are becoming "psychologically bisexual."³⁸ Richardson sees this overlapping of the worlds of men and women as meaning simultaneously that a "radical heterosexuality" is evolving, in contrast to the "male world" and "female world" of the past.³⁹

His thesis is that as humans see themselves differently, their sexual activity changes. Whereas in pre-biblical days, human beings experienced themselves as bodies, and sexual intercourse was becoming "one flesh," now human beings experience themselves as self-conscious, free, and voluntary, and through sexual union the goal is to become "one spirit."⁴⁰

He argues that as a youth experiences his/her sexual learning process, he/she is simultaneously learning about his/her true self.⁴¹

We have seen the questioning in literature and the heightened struggle now, as persons have greater exposure to cultures and subcultures, experience more leisure time and greater anxiety, move into groups, and feel the ambiguity of roles. In the next section the opinions of

³⁷Ibid., p. 81.

³⁸Ibid., p. 89.

³⁹Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 96, 97.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 86.

psychologists, as they challenge the questions of selfhood, will be discussed.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE SELF IN PSYCHOLOGY

Most psychologists agree that the basic sense of selfhood probably begins to develop around the age of two, or before. At this age May says a child becomes conscious of himself;⁴² Bardwick says the child begins referring to himself as "I."⁴³ Rogers uses the phrase "concept of self" to refer to the habitual patterns of thought about the self, which begin when a child is aware of himself as an entity separate from the events surrounding him.⁴⁴

The self is, for Bardwick, that which "acts as a point of stability, a frame of reference, the main organizing principle available in dealings with the social and physical worlds."⁴⁵ It means the same thing for May. "...self is the organizing functioning within the individual and the function by means of which one human being can relate to another."⁴⁶

⁴²May, op. cit., p. 73

⁴³William Beardslee, A House for Hope (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 155.

⁴⁴Donald H. Ford and Hugh B. Urban, Systems of Psychotherapy (New York: Wiley, 1963), p. 408.

⁴⁵Bardwick, op. cit., p. 154.

⁴⁶May, op. cit., p. 79.

For Rogers it is the hidden essence or feeling of beingness, while, for Gestaltians the self is that which emerges and recedes when contact is made with the environment.

William James categorized religion in terms of the psychological concepts of the self as those that believe in a healthy soul vs. those which believe in a sick soul. He concluded that since the evil facts of nature are as genuine as the good ones, they should be accorded some rational significance in any philosophical system. Religions, such as Buddhism and Christianity, which developed the pessimistic elements of man are more complete than the healthy-minded ones which fail to accord for sorrow, pain and death.⁴⁷

Psychologists fall into similar healthy-sick camps. Freud is the greatest spokesman for psychologists who see the sorrowful side of man. More recent psychotherapists emphasize the value of bringing out the positive expression of self, even though the negative side is admitted as existing.

The psychologists after Freud whose views will be given here are: Maslow, Rogers, Bardwick, May, and Gestaltians.

Freud states that the essence of human nature

⁴⁷ William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Collier, 1961), p. 141.

consists of elemental instincts, which are in themselves neither good nor evil. He explains that we classify the instincts by their manifestations.⁴⁸ He affirms a human as good and noble "from his very birth,"⁴⁹ but also contradictorily assumes that the human develops through a process in which the "evil human tendencies" are eradicated and replaced by good ones.⁵⁰ He does not elucidate his comment on the goodness of human beings, but emphasizes the evil. "It is certainly astonishing that evil should show itself to have such power..."⁵¹

Freud sees persons as having instinctual impulses which must be set into motion.⁵² Persons can do no more than that. Persons are not free to transform themselves, only to control and alter the avenues of fulfillment of these instinctual drives.

His basic view of man is negative:

The bit of truth behind all this - one so eagerly denied - is that men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love...but that a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as a part of their instinctual endowment.⁵³

A journal article entitled, "The Changing Language

⁴⁸Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" (Chicago: Benton, 1952), p. 758.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 757. ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 758. ⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Sigmund Freud, "New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" (Chicago: Benton, 1952), pp. 807-884.

⁵³Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontent (Chicago: Benton, 1952), p. 787.

of Self" relates the difference between Freud's self and the self in the seventies. Freud worked with persons who were hysterical, righteous, moralistic, and denying their unconscious drives and impulses. The self he saw was a captive between forces of love and self destruction. The modern person has assumed a role of greater self-expression. He/she has greater freedom in his/her attitude, desires, and acts of sex. The language of self in the seventies is in the realm of consciousness and the meaning or absence of goals. Rhetoric has moved from content and causality to skepticism, questioning, and honest doubt.⁵⁴

In contrast to the minimal amount of freedom given to the self of Freud, Maslow rests on the faith that if "free choice is really free and if the chooser is not too sick or frightened to choose, he will choose wisely, in a healthy and growthward direction, more often than not."⁵⁵ Maslow appreciates Freud's great discovery - that the great cause of much psychological illness is the fear of knowledge of oneself. The task of the therapist is, then, to use techniques which will strengthen the patient so that he can bear the truth.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Frederick J. Hoffman, "The Changing Language of Self," Contemporary Psychoanalysis, VII: 2 (Spring 1971).

⁵⁵Abraham H. Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1962), p. 48.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 60.

The truth is, for Maslow, that persons have an essentially biologically based inner nature which does not seem intrinsically evil, but is rather good or at least neutral. Therefore he believes it is best to bring out and encourage that inner nature. He further believes that if the essential core is denied expression, the person gets sick.⁵⁷ He believes that "no theory of psychology will ever be complete which does not centrally incorporate the concept that man has his future within him, dynamically active at this present moment..."⁵⁸ He perceives that persons both discover and uncover themselves and also decide on what they will be.⁵⁹

The real self, seen for Maslow through what he terms, "self-actualized" persons, and seen most clearly in peak-experiences⁶⁰ feels "integrated," as a "unified whole," "all-of-a-piece...."⁶¹ He also views the whole world as unity.⁶²

Rogers was influenced by liberal Christianity, especially in the early part of his career. It is this author's opinion that that may have influenced Rogers to take seriously the dark side of man. He affirms the dark

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 3. ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 15.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 13. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 103.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 104. ⁶²Ibid., p. 88.

side, but believes that the force or thrust for growth overbalances the destructive forces.⁶³ "There is no beast in man. There is only man in man."⁶⁴ He seems to become more convinced of this positive thrust as he matures. In Client-Centered Therapy the growth forces overbalanced the regressive ones, "but not by some large margin."⁶⁵ A decade later, in On Becoming a Person, Rogers affirms that man discovers "that his own organism is trustworthy."⁶⁶ Although he continues to recognize the "tremendous capacity for destruction,"⁶⁷ he reflects, "when he is most fully man, when he is him complete organism, when awareness of experience, that peculiarly human attribute, is most fully operating, then he is to be trusted, then his behavior is constructive."⁶⁸ He also points out that self-acceptance is the beginning of change.⁶⁹

Rollo May, an existential psychologist, believes that we have lost the sense of the worth and dignity of the

⁶³Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 5; and Carl Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 122.

⁶⁴Rogers, On Becoming, p. 105.

⁶⁵Rogers, Client-Centered, p. 122.

⁶⁶Rogers, On Becoming, p. 118.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 5. ⁶⁸Ibid., p. 105.

⁶⁹Rogers, Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups, pp. 24-25.

human being.⁷⁰ "Many persons...have lost their conviction of how crucially important the problem of rediscovering the sense of self is."⁷¹

However, he believes that where there is anxiety, there is conflict, and as long as a conflict is going on, a constructive solution is possible. "What is necessary for the constructive use of anxiety is, first of all, that we frankly admit and face our perilous state, individually and socially."⁷²

To admit our state is to see the potentialities and the shortcomings, not to condemn ourselves. He sees condemnation of the self as the quickest way to get a substitute sense of worth. "It is as though the person were saying to himself, 'I must be important that I am so worth condemning' or 'Look how noble I am: I have such high ideas and I am so ashamed of myself that I fall short.'"⁷³

The potentialities for the self are freedom, responsibility, courage, love, and inner integrity. These are never perfectly realized by anyone. They are goals which give meaning to the self's movement toward integration.⁷⁴ To move toward fulfillment of his potentialities is to be a person. "This is what is meant when it is stated in the

⁷⁰ May, op. cit., p. 49.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 55. ⁷² Ibid., p. 34.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 86. ⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 236.

Hebrew-Christian religious tradition that man is created in the image of God."⁷⁵

Gestaltians place trust in what is termed "organismic self regulation"⁷⁶ and claim that "the maxim 'Know Thyself' is a humane ethics...."⁷⁷ However, the self is not fixed, but exists whenever there is a boundary interaction.⁷⁸ In fact, because most people are constantly projecting themselves onto one thing or another, they have a void where the self could be.⁷⁹

The self is contrasted strongly with the ego in Gestalt therapy. Where the self is the system of contacts, the ego is the system of identifications and alienations.⁸⁰ The ego, id, and personality are three partial systems which occasionally seem to be the self.⁸¹

The trust which Gestaltians have in the organism explains their urging a person to be who he is. The goal is a unitary functioning of the whole person.⁸² This

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 75.

⁷⁶Frederich Perls, Ralph F. Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, Gestalt Therapy (New York: Dell, 1951), p. 216; and Frederick Perls, Gestalt Therapy Verbatim (Lafayette, Ca.: Real People Press, 1969), p. 16.

⁷⁷Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, op. cit., p. 330.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 373. ⁷⁹Perls, op. cit., p. 219.

⁸⁰Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, op. cit., p. 235.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 369. ⁸²Ibid., p. 76.

implies that the verbal speech and the felt awareness of
the self are in harmony,⁸³ that emotions are in a continuity with experience, and that projections have been taken
back and reassimilated.⁸⁴

Confrontation is advocated in the form of frustrating avoidances to growth, but the goal is not to develop the conscience, but to dissolve it, allowing "principles that you ought to live by...seem to emerge from your bones."⁸⁵

Gestalt Psychology professes to be secular. It's trust is in man, not God, or man as an expression of God.

We have discussed several psychologists' conceptions of the self. Freud affirmed the goodness of the self but spoke about curbing its evilness. Maslow, Rogers, and May recognize the self's dark side, but emphasize the growth forces and believe that encouragement toward self expression brings forth the good. Gestalt psychology recognizes the low level of beingness in humans normally, but believes that through the frustration of avoidances toward being, the unified self does emerge.

Recent studies which have focused on the selfhood

⁸³Ibid., p. 86.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 99.

⁸⁵Perls, op. cit., p. 220.

of women have dealt with subidentities. Bardwick explains that the core self is general and probably changes slowly with age.⁸⁶ Subidentities, which are acquired while a person performs roles, are the products of the expectations the society holds about each role, the unique characteristics the person brings to the role, and the person's perceptions of himself in the role.⁸⁷ These subidentities are also rather stable, but are a function of both sex and age.⁸⁸

Bardwick proposes that an independent sense of self, a sense of self that evolves from role participations and subidentities, develops later in women than in men. The reason given for this is that the "critically important specifically feminine roles" cannot be rehearsed - "they must wait until the girl marries and has a child."⁸⁹

THE EASTERN VIEW OF SELF

Zen Buddhism and Sankara's Advaita Vedantist Hinduism both affirm the unity of self and God. "Buddha-Nature" is the term for "God" in Buddhism, as is "Brahman" in Hinduism.

The nature of Zen does not lie in scholarship, philosophy, in the Buddhist doctrine, and not even in

⁸⁶ Bardwick, op. cit., p. 155.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

⁸⁸ Ibid. ⁸⁹ Ibid.

zazen It lies in one thing alone, namely seeing into the Buddha-nature that is in each person.⁹⁰

All is Buddha-nature - there is nothing else.⁹¹
It is devoid of mass, but it is living and dynamic and is in the process of infinite transformation. It is beyond individuality, for it is all and in all as all.⁹²

The path of the oxherd is one in search of Buddha-Nature. Since Buddha-Nature is Self, the path leads nowhere until the oxherd lets go of masks, lets go of searching, and finds Buddha-Nature within. Enlightenment is being what one truly is.

The individual self ceases to assert himself as a "center of unification" or a center of consciousness. God Himself is the deepest center of consciousness and unification.⁹³

The question of good or evil does not apply to the real Self, for Buddha-Nature is "absolutely pure."⁹⁴

Unity of action and intention is a product of enlightenment. When one is hungry, he eats; when sleepy, he

⁹⁰ M. H. Trevor, The Ox and His Herdsman (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1969), p. 95.

⁹¹ Philip Kapleau, The Three Pillars of Zen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 73.

⁹³ Thomas Merton, Zen and the Birds of Appetite (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 69.

⁹⁴ Suzuki, Daisetz Tertaro, Manual of Zen Buddhism (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 165.

sleeps. Rogers described the healthy individual in similiar terms. "if the body says it's tired, you listen to it and believe it, instead of criticizing it."⁹⁵ Gestalt echoes the similar goal of inter-psychic-action unity. "What seems so simple and is, nevertheless so difficult - awareness of the fact that you are eating when you are eating!"⁹⁶ For Zen the goal is to see, experience, and embody the joy that comes from knowing that things are as they are.

There is no hesitation to express radical monism.
Self is Buddha-Nature:

I look at the flower and the flower looks at me. In this region of the heart, in which all distinction between "self" and "other" has vanished, the original nature of the self is present.⁹⁷

Vedanta Hinduism is divided with regard to the understanding of the self. Non-dualists insist that atman (self) is the universal and infinite.⁹⁸ Qualified non-dualists, like Ramanuja, believe that there is no such thing as undifferentiated Brahman, that the world, the self, and God are real, and that the enlightened self does

⁹⁵Rogers, On Becoming, p. 117.

⁹⁶Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman, op. cit., p. 69.

⁹⁷Trevor, op. cit., pp. 43, 48-49.

⁹⁸

Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 507.

continue to have individual existence, rather than being "dissolved into God."⁹⁹ Dualists, like Madhva, affirm God as transcendent and imminent.¹⁰⁰

The most adamant spokesman for the Non-dualistic Vedanta school is Sankara (788-820? AD). He argues that it is senseless to insist upon a plurality of selves and to maintain that the individual self is different from the highest self. It is senseless because the Self is called by many names, but it is only one.¹⁰¹ As long as the individual self is in ignorance, believing in duality, it remains the individual self. But when it rises to the knowledge of the Self which expresses "I am Brahman" then it is the highest Self, no longer an individual self.¹⁰²

Immortality is, in fact, viewed as this knowledge of the self as Brahman.¹⁰³ It is impossible for the eternally unchanging Self, which is one mass of knowledge, to perish. Therefore, when the self departs from the body, although specific cognition vanishes, the Self is not destroyed.¹⁰⁴

The individual self in ignorance acts, enjoys, does good and evil, is affected by pleasure and pain, and so on, but the enlightened Self as the highest self is free from

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 508.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 509.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 520.

¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 514, 515.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 518.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 519.

all evil; it is free from all limiting conditions.¹⁰⁵

Aurobindo Ghose considers himself to be an Advaita Vedantist. He does, however, maintain that the individual self exists, but that it is simultaneously Brahman. Aurobindo will be the Hindu theologian discussed in the next chapter.

Alan Watts, a contemporary philosopher-teacher-writer, draws on the insights of Vedanta Hinduism, but speaks in a style which is completely modern and Western. In his book, The Book, he calls our "tacit conspiracy to ignore who, or what we really are"¹⁰⁶ the mighty "taboo of taboos" in our culture.¹⁰⁷ The taboo: "you're IT!... the ultimate Ground of Being is you."¹⁰⁸ Because no one thing or feature of this universe is separable from the whole, the only real You, or self, is the whole.¹⁰⁹

He explains our culture's reaction to this:

Yet in our culture this is the touchstone of insanity, the blackest of blasphemies, and the wildest of delusions. This, we believe, is the ultimate in megalomania,¹¹⁰ an inflation of the ego to complete absurdity.

Watts believes that the reason our culture reacts so to this knowledge of the self is that we think of God as

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 514.

¹⁰⁶Watts, op. cit., p. ix.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 48.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 15.

the "King of the Universe, the Absolute Technocrat."¹¹¹ But for Watts, as for Vedanta, "God is 'underneath' rather than 'above' everything, and he (or it) plays the world from inside."¹¹²

Alan Watts, like Aurobindo, does not say one ought to awaken from the ego-illusion. Vedantists have trust that things will take their course,¹¹³ that when it is right for us to awaken, we will. In fact, Watts argues that it is impossible to teach an ego not to be egotistic. The only way to move beyond the illusion that one is a separate ego is by experience and experiment.¹¹⁴ Zen Buddhists would agree with this, too.

For the prominent monist Eastern views, then, a human is, as his true Self, pure and good. The individual self is either one with the universal Self (Vedantism), or no individual self is posited (Buddhism). And, finally, the self, unless it is nothing, is infinite, being the universal.

Watts confronts the Western Christian view of self which has been obsessed with what he calls a false humility. The falseness has two sides to it. First, we put ourselves down as mere "creatures," coming into the world either by the "fluke of blind forces" or the "whim of God."

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 16. ¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 20. ¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 18.

Then, we consider ourselves to be separate personal egos, fighting to control the physical world. The real humility, according to Watts, is the recognition that we are members of the biosphere and "cannot exist at all without the cooperation of plants, insects, fish, cattle and bacteria." Not only have we lacked adequate humility, but we have also lacked proper self-respect, a respect which derives from knowing "that I, the individual organism, am a structure of such fabulous ingenuity that it calls the whole universe into being."¹¹⁵

For Watts, "we do not need a new religion...we need a new experience - a new feeling of what it is to be 'I.'"¹¹⁶

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SELF

Paul's anthropology and early Christian views

Paul's theological background was threefold:
 Jewish, Greek, and Christian.¹¹⁷ He normally read the Greek Septuagint; he wrote his letters in "common Greek"; he was immersed during his entire ministry in Greek culture.¹¹⁸ However, in his anthropology, Paul was as he

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

¹¹⁷ Archibald Hunter, The Gospel According to St. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 9.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

describes himself, "a Hebrew of Hebrews,"¹¹⁹ for his thoughts are, in their "grass-roots," Jewish.¹²⁰

The Jews made no distinction between parts and wholes. Therefore, it was natural to name a whole by any one of its parts. This is what they did with the body. The whole body could be named by naming the heart or the mind, for example.¹²¹ Paul retained the Jewish idea of wholeness, but used two Greek words, "soma" (body) and "sark" (flesh), to speak of the whole person seen from two different angles.¹²² Soma is the person in relation to God. Sark is the person extranged from God.

For Paul the person is the body or flesh, he does not have body or flesh. This recognition of a psycho-physical unity is another Jewish view, which contrasts to the Greek view that the personality possesses a body.¹²³

Paul used the word "soma" as one could use the personal pronoun, "I."¹²⁴ It represents the physical presence of the person.¹²⁵ Soma can be used to mean just the body (Rom. 8:20), but it means, too, the whole person,

¹¹⁹ John A. T. Robinson, The Body (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 11.

¹²⁰ Hunter, op. cit., p. 11. ¹²¹ Robinson, p. 13.

¹²² Hunter, op. cit., p. 57.

¹²³ Robinson, pp. 14, 30. ¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

¹²⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 193.

not just the body (Rom. 8:11).¹²⁶ It infers unity and that which is most intimately connected with the person. It is the "self,"¹²⁷ or the "personality."¹²⁸

Bultmann emphasizes that soma points to the self's distinct ability to make itself consciously the object of its own action or to experience itself as the subject to whom something happens.¹²⁹ Because soma has this relationship with itself, there is a double possibility. It can be at one with itself or at odds.¹³⁰ The soma itself is neutral to good or bad, but it is only because it is soma that the possibility for good or evil exists; it is only because it has relationship to itself that it can have a relationship with or against God.¹³¹

Sin is estrangement from God. It is universal because when a person is called to selfhood, he tries to live on his own strength, not God's.¹³² However, there is the possibility for the sinner to understand himself anew. He is capable of deciding, when confronted by the gospel, to base his life in God.¹³³

¹²⁶ Hunter, op. cit., p. 57, Robinson, p. 30, and Bultmann, op. cit., p. 195.

¹²⁷ Bultmann, op. cit., p. 195. ¹²⁸ Robinson, p. 30.

¹²⁹ Bultmann, op. cit., p. 195. ¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 196.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 198. ¹³² Ibid., p. 246.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 269.

Persons were made to be in fellowship with God. Sin creates the need for reconciliation, for it destroys this relationship. But a person cannot restore the relationship alone. God must do that. However, the Gospel for Paul is precisely that God has done it, in Christ and in history. There is no parallel in Judaic or Greek thought for this, since God is reconciled to persons in Judaism, and persons are a part of, not in relationship to, God in most Greek thought.¹³⁴

For early Christians, the self was seen to be in relationship with God and responsible to respond to God's grace. For the Jews, the self was made in the image of God and responsible to fulfill God's laws. For Gnostics, the self was of divine origin, seeking gnosis and eventual release from earthly existence to return to the Divine. For early Stoics, the self was most frequently seen to be a fragment (*άροτρον*) of the divine, responsible to use that divine part in its daily living.

Paul, like the thinkers of his environment, recognized dualistic tendencies in persons. Wherever he speaks of the struggle between the aspirations of the mind and the impulses of the body (Rom. 7:23), he is influenced by the Hellenistic world, for Judaism has never viewed sin as a struggle within a person.¹³⁵ Paul is Jewish in his view

¹³⁴Hunter, op. cit., p. 17.

¹³⁵George Foot Moore, Judaism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), I, 485-486.

that sin separates the self from God,¹³⁶ but distinctively Christian in his view that God reconciles persons.¹³⁷

Modern Christian views of self

It is the task of Christian theologians to ask anew the questions of selfhood. There are diverse viewpoints. Most Christians consider that humans need to be confronted with their tendencies to sin in order to develop a more loving community. Most Christians affirm the separation between self and God, but there are those who lean toward a more unitary view.

John Cobb brings to light an important insight regarding the self's relationship to God. For him, it is unfortunate that dualism and monism are most often dualistically conceived. He is pluralistic with respect to this classification. He believes that we have paid an enormous price for the New Testament conception of spirit and flesh dualism. Spirit and flesh can best be conceived dipolarly. The Incarnation is indeed the paradigm for this: the greater the humanity, the greater the divinity. One price which has been paid is the alienation of selves toward selves, toward God, and toward the environment.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Ibid., I, 472. ¹³⁷ Ibid., I, 474.

¹³⁸ John B. Cobb, Jr., class lectures on tape at School of Theology at Claremont for "The Christian Understanding of Man," Spring 1972.

Meland retains the radical separation between self and God. He discusses sin as the breaking not of the relationship, but of the covenant with God.¹³⁹ Reclamation is a movement of grace. This is the New Creation of Christianity.¹⁴⁰ However, there is never a transfer of divinity to human nature. The "distinction between humanity and divinity is judiciously observed."¹⁴¹ He quotes a Hindu priest as saying, "Once a man comes to know that his life is divine, he will live up to that conception of himself."¹⁴² For Meland this "idealization of man" is merely a barrier - a barrier to belief in the transcendent God, which is necessary for true faith.

The attitude of being God which Meland attacks is seen by Clinebell as creating a defensive pride, one which defends against a deeper feeling of unworth. Clinebell cites Oliver Wendell Holmes' statement, "The first step toward a truer faith is the recognition that I, at any rate, am not God."¹⁴³ For Clinebell the recognition of this fact

¹³⁹ Bernard E. Meland, The Realities of Faith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 46.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 217. ¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁴³ Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. and Charlotte Clinebell, The Intimate Marriage (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 193, citing Oliver Wendall Holmes as quoted in Erik Erikson, Insight and Responsibility (New York: Norton, 1964), p. 30.

opens the self to enter into real communion both with other people and with the "Power of the universe,"¹⁴⁴ for communication requires non-identity, but some "alikeness."

For Meland the "I am God" statement is a barrier to faith in God, but he relates the communion with God to the total nexus of relationships with other men and creatures as well, so it would be a barrier to people, too.

However, there are theologians who are considered to be Christians, or consider themselves Christian, at any rate, who do see God and self in a more monistic manner.

Robinson is one of these. He calls his theology "unashamedly panentheistic." God is everything, and everything is in God.¹⁴⁵ "All things, all events, all persons are the faces, the incognitos of God."¹⁴⁶ How like Alan Watts this is! As would be expected, Robinson has received much protest for his view, for it does go against the Christian dualism. However, if the transcendent as well as immanent nature of God is emphasized, as Robinson has tried to do by the use of the word of panentheism rather than pantheism, then he finds more room for agreement amongst liberal protestant theologians.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ John A. T. Robinson, Exploration Into God (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 92.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 94

Sherill retains the relationship-oriented concept of God as other, "infinitely beyond man," and calls God the "infinite Personal Being." Yet he asserts God is also within humans. He proceeds to describe the relationship between human self and Self, "analogous to but not identical with the relationship between human self and human self."¹⁴⁷

Is the human being seen as good and/or evil? Cobb explains that although there was no doctrine of original sin in Judaism, for all Christians there is, because Christians see what one is, not what one ought to be.¹⁴⁸ Daniel Day Williams speaks of the "omnipresence of sin," but he believes that that should not obscure the positive good in human life and human loves...¹⁴⁹ Most Christian theologians, then, believe in the ontological goodness of the human, but also in the human's ethical sinfulness.

We will look first at how sin is defined, then at the various expressions of what to do about that sin.

Wieman calls "any resistance to creativity for which man is responsible" sin.¹⁵⁰ Williams explains that

¹⁴⁷ Lewis Joseph Sherrill, The Gift of Power (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 16-17.

¹⁴⁸ Cobb, lectures.

¹⁴⁹ Daniel Day Williams, The Spirits and the Forms of Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 152.

¹⁵⁰ Henry N. Wieman, The Source of Human Good (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1946), p. 126.

"'sin' in the Christian sense of that word...is life turning away from life in communion...man's wilful violation of his essential and created goodness."¹⁵¹ Sin for Meland is a "breach and betrayal of relationship,"¹⁵² or "a violation of the pact of the covenant through man's irresponsible assertion of his freedom and consequent unfaithfulness."¹⁵³ Cobb explains original sin to be evidenced by the fact that our interests are not so perfectly formed so that all we need to do is to be perfectly selfish and all will turn out well.¹⁵⁴ Niebuhr, whose view will be studied at greater lengths in chapter three, defines sin to be centering trust in our self rather than God.

For most of these theologians, the very fact of sin arises from the possibilities which are inherent in our human goodness. Cobb's view of the Christian self is that he is responsible for himself. In prophetic existence man was responsible for his actions. But the spiritual existence which characterizes Christians presupposes radical self-transcendence, which means that persons are responsible for looking at themselves to confront themselves with who they are. It is the possibility for self-tran-

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 141.

¹⁵² Meland, op. cit., p. 244.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁵⁴ Cobb, lectures.

scendence which leads to the sin of selfishness. Meland likewise sees the possibility for sin arising from the self's spiritual potentials. The human is really a free being, an individual person, and as such is responsible to God and to other humans. He sins through his irresponsible use of that very freedom.¹⁵⁵

Williams wants to emphasize that the "fall within the self" is not a betrayal of our best self, but a betrayal of our real self.¹⁵⁶ Seventy pages later Williams cites a passage by a woman theologian, Dr. Valerie Goldstein, in which the sin of betrayal of the real self comes clear. Williams reminds his readers that nearly all theology has been written by men, and that Goldstein says this has given a certain cast to all Christian doctrine, particularly to the doctrine of sin. It is this author's opinion that the sin she speaks of may apply to men as well as women, and that the traditional doctrines may apply to women, too, but that her insight is powerful and is felt in the heart of many women, including this author, today.

For the temptations of woman as woman are not the same as the temptations of man as man....(The woman's) temptations have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as 'pride' and 'will-to-power.' They are better suggested by such terms as triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing centre or focus; dependence on others for

¹⁵⁵Meland, op. cit., p. 244.

¹⁵⁶Williams, op. cit., p. 150.

one's self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy social-bility, and mistrust or reason - in short, under development or negation of the self.¹⁵⁷

What ought a Christian do about sin? Robinson, who took the panentheistic approach to God, believes that we should love the world as it is now, even "while it is doing what it is doing to me...and causing those nearest to me to suffer, and so many others..." because, "If I love the world as it is, I am already changing it: a first fragment of the world has been changed, and that is my own heart."¹⁵⁸ His approach to evil: love, until it changes.

Williams believes that most sin is unconscious and unintended. One step in the direction toward deliverance from sin is to become conscious of it. As one becomes conscious of it one achieves a degree of freedom, independence and mastery over it.¹⁵⁹ Evidently one becomes conscious of it through what Cobb calls radical self-transcending selfhood. Confrontation would be a key.

Meland and Williams mention the process of redemption and insist that it is something God does. In

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 220, citing Valerie Saving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine Viewpoint," in Simon Doninger, ed., The Nature of Man (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), p. 165.

¹⁵⁸ Robinson, op. cit., p. 95.

¹⁵⁹ Wieman, op. cit., p. 127.

Williams' words, "the restoration of the hope for communion is not something we do, but what God has done and continues to do."¹⁶⁰ Meland puts it this way, "Man is destined to remain unrelieved under judgment, except as a goodness not his own intervenes as a resource of grace."¹⁶¹

To fulfill his individuality is the self's humanity. Meland emphasizes the demand to live in community. But he concludes, "individuality lays upon man a demand to fulfill himself that is no less unyielding than the demand to live in community."¹⁶² Cobb affirms the demand for individuality even at the risk of insecurity. He recalls that when individuality was stressed in the middle ages the sense of security that derived from tribal bonds was given up. Likewise he advocates the disruption to the role of the family in modern life while the woman, as well as the man, takes responsibility for being who she is and becomes, too, a Christian.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Williams, op. cit., p. 154.

¹⁶¹ Meland, op. cit., p. 246.

¹⁶² Rogers, Carl Rogers on Encounter Groups, p. 245.

¹⁶³ Cobb, lectures.

CHAPTER II

A HINDU VIEW OF SELF - AUROBINDO GHOSE

Aurobindo considers himself to be an Advaita Vedantist in the Hindu tradition. He speaks out of that tradition, yet criticizes its views of radical monism and illusionism. Instead, he maintains that a view which is neither monistic nor dualistic is possible. He maintains that Brahman and atman are one, but holds that the individual retains his self identity. The self is never swallowed up into "undifferentiated nothingness"; however, it is one with all. Rather than posing a divine reality in contrast to an illusory world, he affirms the reality of the world as well as the divine reality.

This author has chosen to represent the Eastern Hindu tradition's view of self via Aurobindo's primarily because Aurobindo affirms both individual identity and the real world. Even with these similarities to Christianity, Aurobindo is able to fascinatingly maintain the dominant Hindu view of self.

THE SELF: FINITE OR INFINITE?

In order to ask whether Aurobindo considers a human to be finite or infinite, one must ask two clarifying questions. Is the human today or the human in the future infinite or finite? And, is the human as he

expresses himself generally or the human in truth infinite or finite?

Aurobindo's view of self is evolutionary. What was once unconscious is now conscious. What is now self-conscious will be supra-conscious. Within the unconscious expression was the unfolding of consciousness, and, likewise supra-consciousness unfolds from conscious life. The higher does not lose the lower; it builds integrally upon it. Therefore, the supra-conscious is simultaneously conscious and unconscious.

It is similar with the concept of infinity. Time-wise, spatially, and in terms of potentiality, the self is infinite - just as it is. However, it seldom, at this stage in our human evolution, experiences that infinity. The self is in truth now infinite. It is evolving into an aware, infinite being.¹ But it lives today primarily as finite.

Aurobindo reconciles the polarities between matter and spirit, God and human, the one and the many, and the finite world and the absolute.²

¹ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, A Source Book in Indian Philosophy (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 599.

² V. S. Naravane, Modern Indian Thought (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964), p. 221; Aurobindo Ghose, The Mind of Light (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 9; and Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 575.

Because he conceives of infinity expressing itself through creation, it is truly inconceivable for there to be a truly finite form. In his words:

Infinite consciousness in its infinite action can produce only infinite results; to settle upon a fixed truth or order of truths and build a world in conformity with that which is fixed, demands a selective faculty of knowledge commissioned to shape finite appearance out of the infinite reality.³

Yet, as the world exists today there is some intelligibility to the use of the term finite. Aurobindo experiences evolution to consist of two movements concurrently. The "downward" movement is the self revelation of spirit. The absolute descends into the finite. The "upward" movement is an ascent from unorganized matter to absolute consciousness.⁴

This makes more clear the twofold nature of the infinite/finite question. The absolute is descending into the finite while the finite evolves into the absolute. In one sense the finite is now finite. But in the absolute sense and definitely in the future sense, the finite is truly infinite.

THE SELF'S RELATION TO GOD

The relationship between human and God will be discussed in two different ways. First, philosophically,

³ Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 596.

⁴ Ghose, The Mind of Light, p. 81.

Aurobindo's "integral non-dualism" will be explained, in contrast to, for example, monism or dualism. Second, his evolutionary conception of human becoming divine and the divine becoming human will be focused upon. Both of these discussions emphasize Aurobindo's thesis: that human and God are one in truth, are becoming one in awareness, and yet are retaining their individual identities.

Aurobindo's word for his view of ontology is "integral non-dualism."⁵ He attempts, by this naming, to avoid the connotations of both monism and transcendental theism. "We must accept the many-sidedness of the manifestation even while we assert the unity of the Manifested."⁶

The reason he wants to avoid monism is that he wants to retain the identity of the individual self. He points out the absurdity of radical monism quite effectively.

Individual salvation can have no real sense if existence in the cosmos is itself an illusion...In the monistic view the individual soul is one with the Supreme...escape from the sense of separateness and identity with the Supreme its salvation. But who then profits by this escape? Not the supreme Self...not the world...for that remains constantly in the bondage ...it is the individual soul itself which effects its supreme good by escaping from the sorrow...into peace ...Therefore we arrive at the escape of an illusory non-existent soul from an illusory non-existent bondage in an illusory non-existent world as the supreme

⁵Naravane, op. cit., p. 211.

⁶Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 587.

good which that non-existent soul has to pursue!⁷

However, he points out that the consequence of calling God only the transcendent is that individual and universal life tend to become degraded.⁸

In the ordinary distribution of life's activities the individual regards himself as a separate being, both included in the universe and dependent upon that which transcends the universe and individual. It is to this transcendence that is given the name of God. Once this occurs, God becomes to our conceptions more extracosmic than supracosmic. The belittling and degradation of the individual and the universe is the natural consequence of this division.⁹

The concept of the one-in-the-many is helpful in clarifying how it is that the absolute indwells the human, while humanity retains its many identities. The individual self is not just a form of the absolute. It is the absolute - in a "particular poise of being."¹⁰ It is easy, however, to seek this One too eagerly, thus denying the many. "If in the many we pursue insistently the one, it is

⁷ Ibid., p. 586.

⁸ Aurobindo Ghose, The Foundations of Indian Culture (New York: Sri Aurobindo Library, 1953), p. 156.

⁹ Aurobindo Ghose, The Life Divine (New York: Greystone Press, 1949), pp. 35-41.

to return with the benediction and the revelation of the one confirming itself in the many."¹¹

We see a theological ontology which Hartshorne and Reese call "panentheism";¹² the real universe rests on a reality which is simultaneously transcendent and absolute.¹³ Panentheism is in contrast to pantheism, which affirms God to be the cosmos, and theism, which affirms God to be the Beyond.

Not liking the implications of transcendental theism or radical monism when used exclusively, he integrates the two. Brahman and atman are one. Aurobindo does retain this ancient equation. However, he interprets this to mean the transcendent reality is at the same time the immanent divinity of all things.¹⁴

Christian theologians often refer to a past historical revelation-event as the basis for their affirmation that God became human in the person of Jesus Christ.

Aurobindo's theology is mystically referrent to the future. He himself experienced mystical revelations,¹⁵

¹¹ Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 583.

¹² Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, Philosophers Speak of God (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 60.

¹³ Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., pp. 589-591.

¹⁴ Aurobindo Ghose, Essays on the Gita (Calcutta: Arya Publishing House, 1928), p. 125.

¹⁵ Ghose, The Mind of Light, p. 11.

and expects that God will continue to become revealed more completely and more frequently through humans. He writes with the absolute certitude of a mystic. Not only is the future of humankind to be the full revealing of our spiritual nature, but also it is certain to be achieved. Evolution is not mere change. It is definitely a rich change for the better.¹⁶

More detailed attention is given to the upward movement of evolution than the descent of spirit. It is assumed the descent is taking place. The ascent requires effort and knowledge on the self's part; therefore, Aurobindo teaches how to pursue the ascent and inspires his followers to exert the effort.

The ultimate aim or ideal for humans is to fulfill spirit on earth. Evolution from human to spirit may be summed us as, "life accomplishing its own spiritual transformation even here on earth in the conditions of the material universe."¹⁷

The upward movement of the individual self takes place either when he aspires sufficiently or when he becomes sufficiently receptive and passive, open to receive the descent of the higher.¹⁸

¹⁶ Chaudhuri, op. cit., p. 209.

¹⁷ Ghose, The Mind of Light, p. 34.

¹⁸ Aurobindo Ghose, Letters of Sri Aurobindo (Bombay: Sri Aurobindo Circle, 1949), p. 113.

Unlike most Christian theologians, Niebuhr in particular, who find any effort at self-realization to be futile, Aurobindo urges people to attempt to discover their true selves. In fact, "To fulfill God in life is man's manhood."¹⁹ It may take great effort to let go of the veil which seemingly separates us from the absolute, but our task is to achieve conscious identity with the Absolute.²⁰

Aurobindo does not envision a sudden identity with the absolute; there is a constant development of the self until it can reveal the indwelling spirit.²¹

He delineates the levels of consciousness above mind, through which the human traverses. These delineations vary slightly throughout his voluminous writings. In the Mind of Light the chain above mind is: Higher mind,
Illumined mind, Intuition, and Overmind.²²

Throughout the movement upward in consciousness one is aware of the One, but the One is seen to be more and more all-embracing and filled with force. Higher Mind

¹⁹ A. B. Purani, Sri Aurobindo (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1955), p. 307, and Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 584.

²⁰ Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 575.

²¹ Ghose, The Life Divine, p. 734.

²² Ghose, The Mind of Light, p. 94.

produces thought-knowledge, Illumined Mind, illumination, and Intuition, direct intimate vision. The vision of Intuition is still in flashes, but the Overmind sees steadily, calmly, and expansively, both in space and time.²³

Naravane²⁴ gives another delineation: Mind, which sees divisions, rises to Overmind, which is aware of both multiplicity and unity. Overmind rises to Supermind, and an integral outlook is achieved, for Supermind is the link between human consciousness and the Absolute.

In his major work, The Life Divine, Aurobindo discusses the ascent, beginning with matter as moving through Life, Psyche, Mind, and Supermind, to Bliss, Consciousness-Force, and pure Existence.²⁵

In agreement with Cobb's understanding of self today, Aurobindo sees evolution as bringing us to the point of individuality. Although the exact terminologies for the steps in the ascending ladder of consciousness from here on vary, it is clear that the movement beyond individuality involves three types of changes. A psychic change will remove the "veil" which hides our soul or psyche, a spiritual change will bring an abiding sense of the infinite, and a supermental change, brought about by

²³ Ghose, Letters, pp. 126-27.

²⁴ Naravane, op. cit., pp. 213-214.

²⁵ Ghose, The Life Divine, p. 243.

our ascent to the true supermind and supermind's descent to us, will lead us into pure knowledge. We can help to initiate the first of these three changes, the psychic change, by educating our emotions through yoga.²⁶

It is consistent with Aurobindo's affirmation of integralness that matter is neither seen to be repugnant nor an obstacle, nor a shackle binding the spirit. Matter is a form of spirit. It reveals spirit as it evolves.²⁷

If in passing from one domain to another we renounce what has already been given us from eagerness for our new attainment...if we cast away...the physical life...or if we reject the mental and physical in our attraction to the spiritual, we do not fulfill God integrally...only shift the field of our imperfection or at most attain a limited altitude...Not to abandon the lower to itself, but to transfigure it in the light of the higher²⁸ to which we have attained, is true divinity of nature.

The realization of identity is an aim, but not the final goal. We must finally make this awareness of the spiritual essence of all reality our whole motivating force in daily living.²⁹ "By accepting the becoming freely as the divine, we...become luminous centres of its conscious self-expression in humanity."³⁰

²⁶ Naravane, op. cit., pp. 218-219.

²⁷ Ghose, The Mind of Light, p. 35.

²⁸ Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 585.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 576.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 588.

THE SELF: GOOD AND/OR EVIL?

The question of "good" and "evil" is answered by Aurobindo in terms of a "perfection" expressing through the evolving process of life and the "limitations" persons experience in the midst of this process.

For Niebuhr, we will see, it is sin to make the self rather than God the center of existence. For Aurobindo a person lives today on the plane of desires. He is ego-centered, considering his ego to be his separate self. That is a person in his limited expression of the divine. It is not called sin, but rather a limitation. However, a person is called to move away from this self-separated-from-divine existence. There is a certitude for Aurobindo that the person will be aware of the divine spark already within him. The human will allow the divine to manifest. Then he will be ego-centered, but his ego is the Divine-enter.³¹ The discovery and affirmation by each individual of his spiritual beingness is essential to the perfection of the individual. The perfection of individuals is essential for the creation of the perfect community.

Liberation is a term given to the process of moving from limitation to perfection.³² There is no question

³¹Purani, op. cit., p. 315.

³²Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 587.

but that the goal is perfection: "to be perfect as He is perfect is the condition of His integral attainment."³³

If a person attempts to confine the Infinite so that he can seize and hold it in his mind, he will likely make it into some state of being which, being a state, would exclude other states. If he tries to do this he sins against the Infinite's unknowableness and arrives not at a true unity but at a division of the Indivisible. This is true no matter how pure or eternal, however general and comprehensive, however vast or boundless the scope of the state of being which had been grasped.³⁴

To be perfect is the goal - it is liberation. If this is able to be grasped by the mind, however, it is not real.

The liberated human is called the "gnostic man." He responds with his will in accord with the total will.³⁵ He acts out of a basis of unity, but the action is not ethical, in the sense of being a chosen action. He senses, feels, and wills this oneness and simply acts accordingly.

Aurobindo believes that the majority of human beings will probably remain content with a normal or only

³³ Ibid., p. 588.

³⁴ Ghose, The Life Divine, pp. 34-35.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 862.

partially uplifted human nature. He does not condemn this contentment - he accepts it as a fact. However, the transformation of the rest of the individuals would be a sufficient change to influence the mass and to bring to them a promise and hope which is now felt by very few.³⁶ Illumined individuals are essential for the growth of mankind, for as one person becomes conscious of the transcendent, collective humankind will also become more conscious.³⁷

We have remaining to be discussed Aurobindo's radical affirmation of life and his attempts to deal with the "evil" in the world. We will turn first to his remarks concerning the affirmation of life. Afterward, we will see how he sees the "evil" without either denying its existence or withdrawing his affirmation of all that is.

Because Aurobindo considers the world to be real, not an illusion, he is able to consistently affirm life integrally. The body might be seen as an obstacle to spirit if the world were illusion and if the purpose of life on earth were to withdraw from that life. But Aurobindo sees in the world "various formations of the one substance," a reality of oneness manifesting itself in a reality of numberless forms and powers.³⁸ For Auro-

³⁶ Ghose, The Mind of Light, p. 55.

³⁷ Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 586.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 595.

bindo the body, as well as all else which is manifest is a vehicle which can aid in the liberation of spirit.³⁹

Using traditional Hindu terms, Aurobindo summarizes his philosophy regarding the positive affirmation of the cosmos. "I do not agree with the view that the world is an illusion, māyā. The Brahman is here as well as in the supra-cosmic Absolute."⁴⁰

In his discussion of evolution, Aurobindo describes Supermind as the Light seen by the Vedic mystics. As one moves higher in consciousness, one gains an ever increasing affirmation of life, never a negation. He notes that the mystic light he speaks of cannot be equivalent to the "darkness" of the Christian mystics.⁴¹

The gnostic person, a human liberated, is not merely passively affirming. He is dynamic, filled with a spiritual joy, a joy which is found in being or doing, not in reaching a result or in seeking a fruit of action.⁴²

We are to accept the manifest universe, recognizing its many sidedness, but we are to equally assert the unity within. Avidya is the term for a consciousness of multiplicity. Vidya is the knowledge of oneness. We need both avidya and vidya. Knowledge of oneness would be obscured

³⁹ Ghose, The Mind of Light, p. 57.

⁴⁰ Ghose, Letters, p. 3. ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴² Ghose, The Life Divine, p. 867.

if it were to deny multiplicity.⁴³

In the same way, knowledge of perfection would be obscured if evil and suffering in our world were denied.

Aurobindo argues that there is a sense of frustration and disappointment in life that gives a strong motive for those who feel an aversion toward life. However, he argues, the sense of frustration is in no way more conclusive than the idealist's invariable hope.

He recognizes that human, social, and political endeavors always lead nowhere. Human life always remains imperfect, no matter what laws, institutions, education, philosophy, or religions try to do to alter that.⁴⁴ "This view of things may be exaggerated, but it has an undeniable force."⁴⁵

How, then, is evil to be explained? Aurobindo believes that there is a divine possibility which, under certain conditions needs an initiating ignorance as a necessary factor in its development. The arrangement of the universe is such that there is a compulsion of the ignorance to move toward knowledge, of the imperfect to grow toward perfection, of the frustration to move toward a final victory, and of suffering to be but a preparation for the emergence of "the divine delight of being."

⁴³ Radhakrishnan and Moore, op. cit., p. 583.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 590. ⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 591.

If this be so, then the sense of disappointment, frustration, illusion, and vanity of all things is not valid. We are experiencing simply a difficult evolution.⁴⁶ There is no inevitable necessity in our existing limitations.⁴⁷ All the stress of struggle and effort, success and failure, joy and suffering, the mixture of ignorance and knowledge would be the experience needed for the soul, mind, life and physical part to grow into the full light⁴⁸ of a spiritually perfected being.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 592.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 580.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 592.

CHAPTER III

A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF SELF - REINHOLD NIEBUHR

Reinhold Niebuhr, a twentieth century theologian and ethicist, speaks from a well-grounded Christian tradition as he confronts his readers with the Christian view of self. The three questions which will be asked of his theology and anthropology are: What characterizes the self - finitude or infinity?; What is the relationship between God and self?; and Is the self good and/or evil (sinful)?

THE SELF: FINITE OR INFINITE?

The self is a creature which is in constant dialogue with itself, with its neighbors, and with God.¹ The self is always a creature, conscious of its finiteness;² indeed, self-consciousness means the recognition of finiteness within infinity.³ Yet, although finite, the self has the unique capacity to transcend every situation.⁴

¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), p. 4.

² Ibid., p. 85.

³ Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society - A Study in Ethics and Politics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 42.

⁴ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 20.

It becomes clear that for Niebuhr there are two emphases: the self is a finite creature and the self has radical freedom to transcend itself. Niebuhr calls this a "rational absurdity," for the real self is at once in time and beyond time, spatial and yet non-spatial.⁵ In another place Niebuhr poses the paradox again, "There is no sharp line between the infinity in man and the infinity beyond man and yet there is a very sharp line. Man always remains a creature...."⁶ Niebuhr is aware of the expansiveness of the self's capacities, but chooses to explain these limitless possibilities in terms of finitude. His insistence is due to his conviction that any attempt on the part of the self to consider itself infinite is an attempt to see itself as God, which is the self's most basic sin. This insistence on finitude and the underlying reason for it is clear in the following two passages.

In short, however much the range of human imagination may increase, or man's mobility be enlarged, ...man remains a finite creature. He surveys the world from a particular locus...

Sexual, ethnic, and linguistic marks of particularity are all indices of collective particularity. But the final proof of man's creaturely limit is a

⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), II, 24.

⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 17.

fact in his individual life: his death.⁷

The individual is conceived of as a creature of infinite possibilities which cannot be fulfilled within terms of this temporal existence. But his salvation never means the complete destruction of his creatureliness and absorption into the divine...the finite individuality is never regarded as of itself evil, its finiteness...is never obscured. The self, even in the highest reaches of its self-consciousness, is still the finite self, which must regard the pretensions of universality...as a sin.⁸

In the first passage, Niebuhr offers as the final proof of the self's finitude its death. This proof is not one Niebuhr uses often in his writings. The second passage reflects Niebuhr's more consistent refrain. Any attempt to see man the creature as infinite inevitably leads Niebuhr to conclude that the individuality of the self is lost, absorbed into the divine. It also leads him to believe that the self would see itself as God; this he calls sin.

However, for Niebuhr the fact of finitude is not sin; sin is the attempt on the self's part to deny its finitude.⁹ "The created world, the world of finite, dependent and contingent creatures, is not evil by reason of its finiteness."¹⁰ "Human finiteness...(is) essen-

⁷ Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 77.

⁸ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 170.

⁹ Ibid., I, 85.

¹⁰ Ibid., II, 167.

tially good and not evil."¹¹ The "Biblical view is that the finiteness, dependency and the insufficiency of man's mortal life are facts which belong to God's plan of creation and must be accepted with reverence and humility."¹² It is "not his finiteness...but his anxiety about it which tempts him to sin."¹³ "He seeks to turn his creatureliness into infinity; whereas his salvation depends upon subjecting his creaturely weakness to the infinite good of God."¹⁴

The self is finite. Because it has freedom to transcend its situation it becomes anxious. It is insecure in this position. Rather than subjecting its will to God's will, it seeks to overreach its creatureliness.¹⁵ In doing so, it sins.

It is not true (as believed by both classical and modern culture) that if the self were to have greater freedom, it would overcome evil,¹⁶ for in its freedom there will always be the anxiety. "Mere development of what he now is cannot save man, for development will heighten all

¹¹ Ibid., II, 127.

¹² Ibid., II, 167.

¹³ Ibid., II, 168.

¹⁴ Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 17.

¹⁵ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 178.

¹⁶ Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 47.

the contradictions in which he stands."¹⁷

The self's hope, therefore, is not in overcoming its finiteness, but rather in overcoming its sin.¹⁸ "The sinful self...must be 'crucified,'"¹⁹ redeemed by the transformation of evil into good.²⁰ The redemption comes through God's forgiveness, which completes, but does not destroy the self's essential nature.²¹

For Niebuhr, then, there is no question but that the self is finite. It also has freedom. Only a religion of revelation, according to Niebuhr, does justice to these two aspects of the self's essential nature, while also taking into full consideration the character of evil in the human self.

The understanding of good and evil will be further discussed in the third section of this chapter. Now we turn specifically to the relationship between the self and God.

THE SELF'S RELATION TO GOD

Niebuhr's insistence upon the self's finiteness is

¹⁷ Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 306.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, II, 108.

²⁰ Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 20.

²¹ Ibid., p. 306.

due to his strong belief in God's transcendence. His view of the self's freedom seems necessary for his belief in the intimate relationship between self and God. The self is finite, yet free. God is other, yet relates to Its world.

We will first look at Niebuhr's view of God and the self, then turn to his numerous criticisms of other views.

Niebuhr believes that it is only in a religion of revelation that there can be an equal emphasis upon God's transcendence over the world and Its intimate relation to it.²²

Niebuhr's view of God as transcendent is found in his reference to God as "'The Other' at the final limit of our own consciousness..."²³ He recognizes that "This radical otherness of God is an offense to all rationalistic interpreters of life and history."²⁴ It is an offense because it "requires a more explicit act of faith because it leaps a gap of discontinuity between man and God."²⁵

Out of the three alternatives Niebuhr suggests (rationalism, mysticism, and the Biblical view), only the

²² Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 126.

²³ Ibid., I, 130.

²⁴ Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 103.

²⁵ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 71.

Biblical view asserts a discontinuity between the self and God. There are two reasons Niebuhr affirms the need for discontinuity. First, it makes faith essential. Second, it prevents the sin of making the finite self into God or allowing the self to merge with the divine.²⁶

As we saw, the self was tempted to make itself the center of its existence. However, if the self knows the truth about God, that God is more than an extension of the self, then it can repent of the "premature and self-centered completion of his life around a partial and inadequate centre."²⁷ Human life does point beyond itself. But it must not make itself into that beyond.²⁸ Niebuhr points out that the Christian will say persons are created in "the image of God" but not that they "partake of the deity."²⁹

The world, then, is not God. However, this does not mean the world is evil. "Being God's creation, it is good."³⁰ Although good in the ontological sense, the world (persons) would never be ethically good enough to enable a triumph of love or peace. That triumph would only

²⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁷ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, II, 100.

²⁸ Ibid., I, 158.

²⁹ Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 235.

³⁰ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 12.

come through an intervention on God's part.³¹ The concept of intervention underscores the otherness of God again.

The otherness of God is balanced, however, by its relationship of love and will toward persons. One is supposed to be able to accept the distance from God without believing oneself to be evil because of the distance. A person does this by accepting the finite situation, accepting God's love, and finding oneself in terms of obedience to the divine will.³² The self is related to God. This relationship is not to be understood as sharing in the reason of God or finding any point of identity with God. The relation is rather found through repentance, faith, and commitment.³³

It is a twofold action. One must repent and have faith; however, the rebellion against God is overcome finally by divine power, which includes the power of divine love.³⁴

Niebuhr combats so vehemently the mystical, monistic, or rationalistic approaches to God that he speaks primarily of the transcendence of God when he is not attacking those theories. However, he speaks occasionally

³¹ Niebuhr, Moral Man, p. 82.

³² Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 15.

³³ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 84 and Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 34.

³⁴ Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 28.

of the immanent quality of the divine. In the two passages where this was found, Niebuhr does not say "God" indwells the person, but rather names this inner-ness first "an immanent Christ" and then the "Holy Spirit." He carefully points out that the Holy Spirit neither destroys the self nor is an extension of it.

The idea of the "inner light" and of a "hidden seed" always suggests that the divine element in human life may be found at the deepest level of consciousness or the highest level of mind...³⁵

The "hidden seed" and the "inner light" is an immanent Christ...³⁶

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of God indwelling in men....(It) never means a destruction of human self-hood....Yet the Holy Spirit is never a mere extension of man's spirit...³⁷

It is important for Niebuhr that the self does not become "everything" (for that is the sin of equating self=God), but equally important that the self not become "nothing," that it does maintain its unique individuality.

He views mysticism, idealism, naturalism, and romanticism as allowing the self to become in the final analysis either nothing or everything.³⁸

Specifically, he argues that mysticism insists on the full dimension of the height (or depth) of the human

³⁵ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, II, 172.

³⁶ Ibid., II, 176. ³⁷ Ibid., II, 99.

³⁸ Ibid., I, 92.

spirit, but loses the value of individual uniqueness by identifying uniqueness with creatureliness, which is to be overcome.³⁹ (He explains that many moderns who have discovered the depth of human selfhood have turned to the mystic alternative in preference to the Biblical one, for the Biblical alternative embodies the presuppositions of the personality of God, the dialogical relationship between God and person, and the historical "revelation" event, all of which the modern mind finds difficult to affirm.)

He argues that the transcendent God of Biblical faith is known in the finite world, but that in mysticism, God is found only after one penetrates deeply into the mystery of his own being.⁴⁰ This argument seems to be an attempt to point out that God's presence in the finite world is more important than his presence "deep" within the person.

Another argument against mysticism concludes:

Here the search for undifferentiated being reaches the height of asserting a type of being as the goal of existence about which one can not be certain whether it is the fullness or the absence of being. It is certainly being bereft of all relationships and meanings.⁴¹

He speaks of a "too consistent monism" as sentimen-

³⁹Ibid., I, 58. ⁴⁰Ibid., I, 126.

⁴¹Niebuhr, The Self, p. 64.

tal, and of less virtue even than a defeatism derived from a too consistent dualistic view. Although spirit-body dualism may bring one to despair, it is at least somewhat "realistic," in contrast to the monistic view.⁴²

Against the rationalistic concept, in which God is identified with some level of human consciousness, either rational or super rational, Niebuhr argues that they invariably falsify the human situation by either failing to appreciate the total stature of freedom in the self or the complexity of the problem of evil in it.⁴³

God is loving will. Therefore the highest self-realization is reached by subjecting the particular will of the self to the universal will of God.⁴⁴

Niebuhr points out that the Christian view of self (as finite and free) is only possible from the stand-point of Christian theism,⁴⁵ in which God is other, yet related through love and will to the self.

We have dealt with the self's finiteness, with its distinctness from, but relation to God, and discovered that its sinfulness enters into the picture when it tries to deny its finitude and tries to usurp God's place as the center of existence. We turn now to the problem of the

⁴² Niebuhr, Moral Man, p. 78.

⁴³ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 131.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 252. ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 251.

good and evil in the self.

THE SELF: GOOD AND/OR EVIL

A person is made in the "image of God." This implies a high estimate of the human stature. That person is a "sinner." This stands in paradoxical juxtaposition, for it provides a low estimate of human virtue. Both are Niebuhr's Christian view of self.⁴⁶

Niebuhr definitely argues that creation is good. He refutes any concept of total depravity, for "man can be a sinner only because he is a child of God." As a child of God, a person has freedom. With his freedom, he does evil.⁴⁷ If he were not free, that is, created "good," he could not sin.

The Christian is to discern the goodness of creation beneath the corruptions of human sin. He is not to be driven to despair by the sin, but to believe in God as a redeemer as well as creator. The Christian is to have confidence that evil cannot overwhelm the good.⁴⁸

Niebuhr suggests that if one were to affirm only that the human self is good then he will beg his own ques-

⁴⁶ Ibid., I, 16, and Reinhold Niebuhr, Man's Nature and His Communities (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 23.

⁴⁷ Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 190.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 132.

tion, for the evils of human history will rely inevitably upon that human self. However, if one were to affirm only that the self is evil, the very recognition of that evilness would imply goodness.⁴⁹

The world is both good and evil. The proper attitude toward it is one of both gratitude and contrition.⁵⁰ As life proceeds, both the good and evil increase.⁵¹ Therefore, the problem cannot completely be resolved in history.⁵²

As much as good and evil are contrasted, it may seem that there are two selves in an internal dialogue. But this is not so.⁵³ "The healthy self is always one self, no matter how much it engages in a perpetual internal dialogue."⁵⁴

Niebuhr assumes that the self easily feels good; therefore, he spends most of his time explaining the presence, nature, and inevitability of sin.

The self is finite. That is not sin. It is also spirit, and as spirit transcends its situation. It fore-

⁴⁹ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 2.

⁵⁰ Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 210.

⁵¹ Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 233.

⁵² Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 146.

⁵³ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

sees and becomes anxious. This anxiety is not sin either; it is its precondition.⁵⁵ It is at the precise point where the self tries to transmute its finiteness into infinity or its weakness into strength or its dependence into independence that the self sins.⁵⁶ Sin is never solely the self's "ignorance of his ignorance." The self is always aware of its finiteness as it attempts to become infinite.⁵⁷

Sin is inevitable because it arises from the freedom of reason which endows humans.⁵⁸ The root of sin is in spirit - not in nature. This fact is essential, for it makes clear that the body is not the basis of evil, nor is the self's finitude.⁵⁹

The inevitability of sin is what Niebuhr refers to as "original sin" - nothing more. (In fact, he regrets using the term so consistently in The Nature and Destiny of Man, because so much was read into its usage that he had not intended.) The phrase "original sin" or the "inevitability of sin" simply refers to a "universal inclination" of the self to be more concerned with itself than to

⁵⁵ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 183.

⁵⁶ Ibid., I, 251. ⁵⁷ Ibid., I, 181.

⁵⁸ Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 294, and Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 167.

be embarrassed by its undue claims.⁶⁰

Even though this universal tendency toward sin is valid, original sin is not regarded as a part of the self's essential nature, and it is not, because transcendence over the self is a part of its nature, and that creates the possibility of not sinning.⁶¹ Sin is universal, but not necessary. Niebuhr refers to this as "absurdity in a nutshell."⁶²

The paradox is not so simple. As it stands now the self is both good and evil. It inevitably sins, but has enough freedom to transcend itself and choose not to sin; therefore, it is responsible for sinning. Now another paradox is added. Although the self is free to transcend itself, and therefore responsible, it is not free to do good!⁶³

This paradox is explained with the aid of the understanding of grace. The self cannot obey the law of love by willing to do so because it is too heavily under the power of self-concern. If it is drawn from itself toward others, it is usually through the force of "common

⁶⁰ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 18.

⁶¹ Niebuhr, Faith and History, pp. 93, 95.

⁶² Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 242 and Niebuhr, The Self, p. 99.

⁶³ Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 94.

grace."⁶⁴ On a larger scale, confidence in the goodness of life can only rest upon trust in God - not in the goodness of humans.⁶⁵

According to Niebuhr this ultimate confidence in God is not at all optimism. It begins when optimism is shattered. Niebuhr defines optimism as one's trust in oneself, rather than God, for he sees optimism as breaking when one ceases to trust in oneself.⁶⁶

Faith in God is challenged by the self's belief in its self-sufficiency (optimism) on one side, and by despair on the other. Niebuhr states, "Few people live in permanent despair." Therefore, he believes optimism is a worse enemy to faith than despair!⁶⁷

Niebuhr cites Miss Horney's objection to the religious demand "Be perfect." She believes that human beings would fulfill their potentialities naturally if their growth were not interfered with by the demand for perfection. Niebuhr counters her objection by pointing out that Jesus also "rigorously rejected the claim which men make of achieving perfection."⁶⁸

Although the self cannot by its own will transcend

⁶⁴ Niebuhr, Moral Man, p. 125.

⁶⁵ Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 131.

⁶⁶ Ibid. ⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 115.

⁶⁸ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 140.

its sinfulness, "the self is shattered whenever it is confronted by the power and holiness of God and becomes genuinely conscious of the real source and centre of all life."⁶⁹ Upon the shattering of the self, a "new self" is born. This self is seen to be more truly the "real self."⁷⁰ In fact, Niebuhr argues that the self does not truly know itself except as it knows itself confronted by God.⁷¹ In this shattering of the old self to a centering of life upon God, the self recognizes the reality and power of its self-love and stops pretending it possesses the goodness it does not have.⁷²

This confrontation is explained in yet another way. The self-centered human is filled with shame when he compares his puny will to the holy and omnipotent will.⁷³

The death and resurrection motif is symbolic of the dying to the narrow self in order for the true self to live. The misery of the self in sin and death is recognized, but the dignity of the self transcending death is affirmed.⁷⁴

Repentance, then, is what is called for.⁷⁵ One

⁶⁹ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, II, 109.

⁷⁰ Ibid., II, 110. ⁷¹ Ibid., I, 131.

⁷² Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 198.

⁷³ Niebuhr, Moral Man, p. 51.

⁷⁴ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 238.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 242, and Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 101.

argument for the self's goodness was that in the act of recognizing its sinfulness, it was expressing its goodness. Repentance is this act. Niebuhr suggests that, "The best antidote for the bitterness of a disillusioned trust in man is disillusionment in the self. This is the disillusionment of true repentance."⁷⁶

The self confronted is the self judged. But the judgment of God is matched by Its mercy.⁷⁷ "God takes the sinfulness of man into Himself, and overcomes in His own heart what cannot be overcome in human life..."⁷⁸

The final sin is the self's unwillingness to hear the judgement spoken against its sin.⁷⁹

The self cannot in any way find itself - it's true expression - by trying.⁸⁰ If it tries directly, it only becomes more preoccupied with itself, sinning all the more. If it tries through an attempt at self-forgetfulness, it will again fail, for if the long-term expectation of self-forgetfulness is self-realization, then the old self can never really be forgotten.

The self is never in "rational control of all the

⁷⁶ Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy, p. 32.

⁷⁷ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 65.

⁷⁸ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, I, 142.

⁷⁹ Ibid., I, 219.

⁸⁰ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 32.

unconscious stirrings of selfhood.";⁸¹ therefore, it cannot blot them out. "The self (true self) contracts rather than expands when consciously and consistently it seeks its own ends."⁸²

The Christian, then, is called to lose his life in order to find it - but not to try to do this. The cross clarifies the constitutional norm of selfhood. The constitution of the self prevents "the self from ever finding virtue or happiness or self-realization by seeking them directly or insistently."⁸³

If the true self can be realized - but not by seeking it - how is it accomplished? Niebuhr's answer is: grace. Grace is the instrument of redemption.⁸⁴

Christ as the norm of human nature defines the final perfection of humans in history.⁸⁵ Sin is overcome in principle, but in fact love must always be suffering - not triumphant.⁸⁶

The ideal possibility is that one have such faith in the ultimate security of God's love that any

⁸¹ Niebuhr, Man's Nature, p. 118.

⁸² Ibid. ⁸³ Niebuhr, The Self, p. 232.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny, II, 68.

⁸⁶ Ibid., II, 49.

feeling of insecurity is overcome.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 183.

CHAPTER IV

CRITIQUE OF THE THEOLOGICAL VIEWS

Summarizing Niebuhr's view we see first that the self is finite. It transcends itself, however, and in so doing becomes anxious because it seeks to become more than it is or can be. God is related to the self, and there is an immanent quality to the spirit of Christ or the Holy Spirit which indwells humans, but God is definitely transcendent - the infinite other. The self is good essentially, but because of its freedom, sins. The self is responsible for sinning, yet it cannot, by trying, discover its true possibility. If, however, the self is confronted with its self-centeredness, and if it repents, there is the possibility of rebirth. God's grace is essential to transform the self into a God-centered being. Since the self's freedom includes the possibility for both good and evil, evil has the potential for increasing in proportion to the good.

For Aurobindo the self is infinite. Most persons live as though they were finite, but this is due to their lack of awareness of their infinity. Brahman and atman are one. The depth of the inner self is the same as the height of the Divine. Individuality is maintained, but the self is one with God. The self is good and ever unfolding greater good as it evolves. There is evil in the world;

the self does produce evil, but that is just the evil required for the self to grow into its goodness. Evil is not a fixed necessity in the scheme of things. Through teaching and practice the self can find itself. It is inevitable that perfection will evolve, but persons can do much to allow this to happen through seeking to be what they truly are.

Arguments against the views of Niebuhr and Aurobindo, and consequently against much of their respective traditions, boil down here to three, specifically.

The first argument challenges the assumption, that something is either finite or infinite. If two things are infinite, they are assumed to be the same thing by Niebuhr. Aurobindo appears to be worried by this, yet he speaks of the self as infinite and of God as infinite. Set theory in mathematics is familiar with different degrees of infinity. One infinity can be a subset of another. It is not true, then, that making the self infinite necessarily and logically implies that the self is made into God.

The second argument is possible after the first is posed. If there is agreement in Christianity, Hinduism, and in psychology that the self is healthiest when it is functioning as a unity of body and soul (mind), then why would it not be even healthier to include the unitary functioning of spirit soul and body?

Finally, the last argument regards the self's self

observation, and what needs to be done to bring out goodness. Rather than seeing the world filled with people who are believing themselves to be virtuous, this author sees a world filled with people starved for a feeling that they are "o.k." The quandry of sin is argued against, as well as the ideal of perfection, for the simple awareness that the self is "o.k."

If the self is "o.k." rather than inevitably sinful or in reality perfect, it is argued that the best challenge is to encourage the self to reveal itself - honestly and fully, as it is.

THE QUESTION OF INFINITY

It was seen that Niebuhr affirmed the radical absurdity: the self is always a creature, conscious of its finiteness, yet transcends every situation. He equates finitude with creatureliness and any attempt on the self's part to consider itself infinite as an attempt to be God.

This absurdity is not logically necessary. It is possible to propose an ontology in which the self is a creature, is infinite, and yet is not God, which could also be infinite. The argument is based on the knowledge found in set theory.

The argument here is first that it is possible to have two distinct infinities, one a subset and of a different quality than the other. This first argument is

a mathematical one.¹

The second argument is that it is possible to construct a model for self and God in which both are infinite, yet God is of a different quality.

The set of all even whole numbers is an infinite set. It would be denoted, $\{0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, \dots\}$. The set of whole number multiples of threes is also infinite, $\{0, 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, \dots\}$. There are some elements of the first set, 2, 4, 8, for example, which are not elements of the second. And, visa versa, 3, 9, and 15 are in the second, but not in the first set. There are also elements common to both - 6 and 12, for example. Both sets are infinite. Each is unique.

If we include more possibilities, we could create an infinite set of all real integers. That would be denoted, $\{\dots, -7, -6, -5, -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, \dots\}$. All numbers which were in the previous two infinite sets are now in this new infinite set. The first two retain their identity, not only from this larger inclusive set, but also from each other. The first two, which we will call A and B are "subsets" of the new set, C. C is not a subset of A or B, for there are many elements in C which did not

¹Jean E. Rubin, Set Theory for the Mathematician (San Francisco: Holden-Day, 1967), pp. 106-157, and Tom M. Apostol, Calculus, II (New York: Blaisdell, 1962), pp. 22-26.

appear in A or B.

But there are even larger possibilities. The set of all rational numbers is the set of all possible fractions made by using any of the integers. This set is so huge that between any two numbers, say $2/3$ and $3/4$, there are an infinite number of possible numbers which are greater than $2/3$ but less than $3/4$. One needs only to take the average between the two to get a number which lies between them, then repeat this forever!

As is obvious, sets A, B, and C are subsets of this new set of rational numbers, which we will label D.

The reader may now be convinced that there are different types of infinite sets, some of which may be subsets of the others. The reader may also begin to see that to say that something is infinite does not say that it is the same as anything else which is infinite. All the sets named thus far are sets which are called "countable." In other words, it is possible to arrange all these sets in an array so that the elements can be counted. It is of course impossible to do the counting, but it is possible to set them up to count.

Please notice, too, that there are an infinite number of such countable sets. The set of multiples of two, of three, of four...would be in itself infinite. There could be sets of multiples of $1/2$, $1/4$, etc. or many other possibilities for infinite sets.

Now we take the big leap. All the sets thus far have been of one degree of infinity! Another degree of infinity is exemplified by the set of all real numbers. This new infinite set cannot be put into an array to be counted, so it is called a "noncountable" infinite set. The numbers which appear in this set of real numbers, in addition to all the numbers found in the previous sets, include square roots and other numbers, which, like " π " when divided out never repeat nor end. We have an infinite set which is of a different quality than the infinite number of subsets which it contains.

It is clear, then, that for the self's transcendence to point to infinity, as Niebuhr says, it does not need to make itself into the "beyond" in order to fully be its transcendent, dare we say, "infinite" self!

Niebuhr argued that the Christian view of self as finite and free is only possible within the framework of Christian theology, which proposes that God is other, yet related to the self through love and will. In other words the Christian view of self requires the Christian view of God. It does not follow that the converse, (the Christian view of God requires the Christian view of self), is necessarily true, as Niebuhr implies that it is. One could continue to perceive God as other and related to the self, but see the self as "infinite and free" rather than "finite and free!"

Observing that there can be subsets within infinite sets and, for theology, more strikingly, different degrees or qualities of infinity loosens up the visions possible.

God can be transcendent and immanent quite logically, without resorting to paradoxes or absurdities. God can be transcendent without the consequent degradation to the individual self.

In order to provide the possible model with which to grasp a view of self and God which are infinite but different in quality, we will use Richard and Jane as names for two different individuals. We liken Richard to multiples of two and Jane to multiples of three. They are both countable in terms of degree of infinity; therefore, we will say they are of the same quality. There are many areas Richard and Jane have in common, yet also many areas which are exclusive to their separate identities. Both people have infinite potentials; there is no "excuse" for finitude. Yet, both are limited. Richard can in no way be what Jane is, nor Jane, what Richard is. Richard cannot even communicate some areas of his own life to Jane, no matter how hard they both try, for Jane is limited by her identity to understand only "multiples of three."

All other human beings are infinite sets, just as Richard and Jane are. Since there are an infinite number of possibilities for the sets, each individual is unique, yet all are of one "quality," or "degree," analogous to

"countable" sets in mathematics.

God is analogous to the set of real numbers, which is of a different degree than those representing persons. God is immanent in all persons, yet transcends each person, for God not only includes all elements included in persons, but also has a different nature. Individuals are still distinct from God, for the special set which makes up each person is unique only to that person.

This author does not want to get too carried away with this analogy by proposing details which would go beyond the realm of analogy. However, it should be clear that a model is possible for an infinite God, infinite selves limited by their self-definitions, the immanence and transcendence of God, yet uniqueness to both individuals and to God.

Aurobindo argues that infinite consciousness can produce only infinite results, that it is inconceivable for a finite form to exist because the Infinite expresses itself through creation. This infinite creation of infinities is given logic by the mathematical model.

Aurobindo posed his infinity as infinity in terms of potentiality, space, and time. He failed to emphasize that man, even limited in his understanding of who he is, is still infinite in actuality, as well as in potentiality.

This argument aids Aurobindo's view by giving it an analogy with which to explain the maintainence of unique

individuality while asserting self and God are one. The self can be an infinite subset of God. Both are infinite; both are unique.

Both Niebuhr and Aurobindo want the reference to self and God to be two different references. Both want the self to have God as its center. Both see the self as somehow transcendent over itself. Both want God to be somehow an immanent reality. But Niebuhr affirms a discontinuity of God and self, worried that the self will sin in its attempt to be God. And Aurobindo affirms Brahman=atman and worries that the individual self may not be retained. Neither is aware that both the self and God can be infinite and yet different, without paradox.

Beardslee devotes a chapter in A House for Hope to the discussion of infinity. His argument is as follows. If God is seen to be an infinite expansion of something fragmentarily known in the experience of persons, then the infinite is felt as a pressure upon persons. The feelings of both guilt and creativeness are stimulated by the attitude, "Against my goodness, God's goodness!..."² The self loses dignity when God's all-powerfulness is taken to such an extreme (by Edwards and Calvanists) that the

² William A. Beardslee, A House for Hope (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 57.

self has no freedom of will.³ A consequence of the conception of God as the infinite extension of qualities valued by persons is competition with God.⁴ But the competition is absurd, for the finite self can only retain its dignity by getting rid of the infinite.

Because such problems arose with the view of a finite self and a God which was the infinite extension of the self's valued qualities, there was a return to the ancient, Eastern perception of God as infinite in the sense of being "indefinite."⁵ Beardslee cites Emerson, Watts, Huxley, Toynbee, and Northrop as examples of those who view God as the indefinite infinity.⁶ Beardslee argues that this indefiniteness concept is very pervasive in our modern world.⁷

It is Beardslee's thesis that the shift from a concrete infinite God which was the extension of known human qualities (the Christian contribution to the West) to an infinite God which is indefiniteness is not conducive to hope because hope requires concreteness, not vagueness. He assumes that concrete experiences and moments of life are reduced to unreality if God is infinite indefiniteness.⁸ He proposes, then, a new view of infinity. God is

³Ibid., p. 58.

⁴Ibid., p. 59.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 60.

⁷Ibid., p. 61.

⁸Ibid., p. 67.

not all in all, since God is only one of several fundamental real entities.⁹ God is the infinity of possibility, as the Whiteheadian premordial nature of God; it is the total unification of reality, as Whitehead's consequent nature of God; and it is the infinity of perfection of quality.¹⁰

For Beardslee, the process view that God is one entity among others, and is essentially involved in time ceases to be threatening and becomes liberating.¹¹ There is room for dignity, since freedom is retained.

This author agrees with Beardslee that the concept of God as the infinite extension of good has tended to degrade persons. It may in fact be this conception that leads Niebuhr's people to sin in attempting to compete with God. Hindus do not tend to compete with God, for their God is the undifferentiated. However Hindus struggle with ways to maintain individual identity. Whether or not Beardslee's (or Whitehead's) view of God is helpful, it is important to see the problem posed by infinity.

Beardslee observed how God can be reinterpreted in terms of infinity. It is this author's contention that both the self and God need to be re-interpreted in terms of infinity. In Beardslee's words, "...it is not only the trustworthiness of God that is in question, but the very

⁹ Ibid. ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 71.

coherence of man's selfhood. The two are closely related."¹²

THE QUESTION OF UNITY

Cobb argued against the New Testament view of body and spirit. It is his opinion that the Incarnation signifies that as humans become more human, we become more divine. Cobb suggests that it is possible to find a view which is neither dualistic nor monistic. Aurobindo argues likewise.

Niebuhr has two reasons for maintaining the discontinuity between self and God. First, it makes faith essential. Secondly, it prevents the sin of making the finite self into God.

The second reason is shattered by the possibility of degrees of infinity.

The first reason is not necessary to Niebuhr's anthropology. Niebuhr affirms, "Man is not only soul, as unity of the body, but spirit, as capacity to transcend both body and soul."¹³ If the self is body, soul and spirit, which transcends body and soul, how can there be a radical discontinuity between self and God? A form of

¹²Ibid., p. 94.

¹³Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), I, 30.

unity, yet distinctness would aid Niebuhr in his formulation here, once he is freed from the anxiety of finitude.

Niebuhr, Aurobindo and psychologists such as Rogers and Gestaltians, as well as Zen philosophers affirm the value of unity in action. If body and soul are in unity, would not the unity of spirit, soul and body bring greater health and harmony?

Unity need not imply that the self is swallowed up into God. The multiples of three are still multiples of three while seen from the more inclusive perspective of real numbers.

Unity need not reflect identity. The set of multiples of three are one with the set of real numbers without the two being equated to each other.

The self, infinite and united with God can retain its own limitations and uniqueness. Whitehead illuminates this by differentiating between "general potentiality" and "real potentiality." General potentiality is absolute, whereas real potentiality is related to some actual entity.¹⁴ In terms of pure possibility it is possible that a "five foot, fortyish, fat man could jump seven feet, but

¹⁴ Donald W. Sherburne (ed.) A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 104.

this is not a real possibility."¹⁵ Real potentiality is what is possible for a specific actual entity after its specific, unique limitations have been placed upon the general potentiality.¹⁶

In other words, the self can be infinite, unique, in union with God, yet limited. This can be seen in the number analogy by observing that multiples of three are infinite, unique, united to the set of real numbers, yet limited, for the very description of the set makes the possibility of it including five or three-fourths, for example, as impossible.

A 110 pound girl can be said to have infinite potentials. She can express herself fully in several areas. If spiritual awareness, success, prosperity, fame, beauty, physical agility, excelling in a sport, a family, or any other general goal were desired by her, she could theoretically achieve her goal. However, she would be limited in some specific ways. If fame, for instance, were her goal, she could be a famous ballet dancer or opera singer perhaps, but she could never be a famous professional football player.

It may be argued that if unity with God is conceded in any form at all, terrible consequences will follow. A person may actually feel, "I am God." But this

¹⁵Ibid., p. 224.

¹⁶Ibid.

very understanding may have numerous connotations. The person may be saying simply, "I'm a part of this universe and am somehow important." He may be using this identity as a defensiveness against his real feeling of puniness or inferiority. He may be covering up his real fear of discovering who he is as an individual. He may be expressing his selfish self-orientation. He may be expressing true humility, feeling he is not only needed by the universe, but in need of the universe. He may be taking responsibility for his enormous possibilities. He may be feeling very harmonious with all of life and feeling it intensely as it pulses through him, as in a mystical experience.

According to the attitude taken, unity with God in itself as an ontological fact does not necessitate the usurping of God's will. It may make it easier to accept God's will.

THE QUESTION OF GOODNESS AND/OR SINFULNESS

The final criticism is a difference in observation, focused primarily against Niebuhr.

Niebuhr observes: "Modern man is, in short, so certain about his essential virtue because he is so mistaken about his stature."¹⁷ This author questions whether contemporary persons are so certain of their virtue. It

¹⁷ Niebuhr, op. cit., I, 96.

seems that the observation more accurately is: "Modern humans are so certain about their essential horribleness because they are so mistaken about who they are and so afraid to look."

Over and over again in groups a person exudes some small secret about himself or herself, then fears the others think he/she is horrible, now that he/she is more fully known. Affirmation of his essential "ok-ness" is an overwhelmingly triumphant experience for him. If persons were certain of their virtue, why would they so fear being known? If persons believed themselves to be "ok" as they are, why are there more facades than people?

Do contemporary persons view themselves to be good as Niebuhr assumes? Emerson felt, over a century ago, that we were ashamed of ourselves. Gestalt psychology points out relentlessly that we avoid ourselves. Rogers feels the need to argue against the presence of a beast in man. May brings to light the enormous anxiety of our times. This author concludes that contemporary persons do not necessarily believe themselves to be good.

Niebuhr stated that optimism is worse than despair, for few people live in permanent despair. It has not been this author's experience, even with my attraction to optimistic people, to miss knowing some rather permanently despairing persons. To me, that is the ultimate of tragedies.

Rollo May noted that the modern self-contemptuous emphasis is not representative of the long-term Hebrew-Christian tradition. He quotes Kierkegaard to reinforce his point.

If anyone, therefore, will not learn from Christianity to love himself in the right way, then neither can he love his neighbor...Hence the law is: 'You shall love yourself as you love your neighbor when you love him as yourself.'¹⁸

James felt that completeness was to be sought in a theory of the healthy or sick self. It can be argued that Aurobindo's or Process Thought is a complete system, for they explain the presence of evil. It can be argued that the explanations are not valid, but it cannot be denied that these more "health"-oriented self-systems are complete.

Freud discovered the enormity of the fear of self knowledge. It seems that fear would be so pervasive only if the self were felt to be too bad to face or too ideal to live up to. If one adopts Niebuhr's view, he may fear realizing that he inevitably sins. If he adopts Aurobindo's, he may fear the huge task of becoming or expressing perfection.

A sense of what might be called, "fundamental

¹⁸ Rollo May, Man's Search for Himself (New York: Norton, 1953), p. 88, citing Kierkegaard in Robert Bretall (ed.), A Kierkegaard Anthology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 289.

ok-ness" would not deny either the possibilities for "good" or "evil," yet would affirm self-reflection as a not necessarily scary, possibly exciting, courageous enterprise. By accepting the self as it is, the self may then grow to be more what it can be.

Rogers sees the need for this honest looking at and acceptance of the self as it is. May argues that the first step toward constructive change is facing the present situation, not condemning it.

However, only those who trust the real self will be content to work for honest self-reflection and self-acceptance as steps toward growth. Gestaltians feel being oneself is a humane ethics. Rogers feels growth forces overbalance regressive ones. Maslow believes that free choices will be positive ones. It is fairly accurate to say that modern psychologists are optimistic about the nature of the self, even as they do not deny the negative factors. However, Cobb, as a representative and thoughtful Christian, refuses to accept this optimistic view of the self. He is convinced the self will choose in its own interest, selfishly, if it is truly being itself. He, with many Christians, believes in both the ontological goodness of the self and the inevitable ethical sinfulness. In addition to facing oneself, one must radically confront oneself with one's shortcomings.

Psychologists and theologians recognize good and

evil in the self. Freud, Niebuhr, and Cobb represent those who insist that the self be confronted with its sinful aspects. Maslow, Rogers, May, Gestaltians, Emerson, Williams, and Robinson represent viewpoints which insist that if the self is more encouraged than confronted, it will grow toward good.

This author believes that as the self faces its infinite potentiality and unique set of limitations, it is both encouraged to grow and humble with respect to its many limits. The pressure of omnipotence which Clinebell reacted against disappears, yet the possibility of never-ending growth creates a sense of responsibility which persists as the self grows.

Aurobindo expects perfection from the self. Niebuhr cites Karen Horney as blaming religion for its demand to be perfect. Niebuhr defends the demand, therefore implying his belief that the demand be made. Aurobindo thinks man can achieve his own perfection. Niebuhr leaves this possibility up to God's grace, but still leaves perfection as a goal for the self. Niebuhr argues that Jesus rejected any claim that a man could achieve perfection. It seems very likely that the demand to be perfect creates a sense of guilt in the self which hinders his growth toward greater expression. This confronts both the Eastern and Western views. However the belief that one cannot achieve perfection, does not seem to help matters, as Niebuhr

thinks it does. For, if a person knows he cannot achieve what he is commanded to achieve, it seems he would feel only more, not less frustrated and bewildered. If perfection is sought, it is healthiest that it at least be thought to be attainable!

However, perfection is such an absurd goal for a unique, limited, free individual that it seems far more consistent with a healthy psychological approach to view growth toward good and the awareness of one's "ok-ness" as the goal for the self. As long as perfection is sought some persons will give up without trying and others will claim absurdly to have attained it. If self acceptance and growth are the goals, both extremes could be avoided.

Aurobindo and most Eastern thinkers have confidence in the inevitable evolution of consciousness. Niebuhr and many Christian theologians recognize greater potentials for evil evolving concurrently with the evolution of good. Which attitude might bring the evolution of the greater good?

It can be argued that an expectant attitude helps to create what is expected. This is definitely verifiable in human experience. Yet the degree of expectancy on the part of all consciousness is likely to remain quite low. Increasing this total consciousness level may be a positive benefit the Eastern tradition gives to the world.

It may also be argued that persons do change toward

good when the possibility of evil is offered as a realistic possibility. The environmental crisis is a case in point. Here Niebuhr's Christian view of confrontation will be beneficial.

It is possible that an overly optimistic expectant view has the tendency to reduce personal responsibility for immediate change toward good.

An expectant attitude of evolving good balanced with a confrontiveness of present and possible evil provides the most productive challenge for the infinite, limited, unique self.

A balance between preachy-confrontiveness and non-pushy acceptance of limitations would likely foster both the awareness of a need for change and the initiative and desire to change. This is supported by Clinebell's growth formula: caring and confrontation equals growth!¹⁹

Finally, Aurobindo wants the self to seek self realization, while Niebuhr insists any attempt at self realization fails because only God can initiate the rebirth.

If the self and God are seen to be united, with the self as a subset of God, a healthy balance between the self's aspiring to be itself and the self's recep-

¹⁹ Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., The People Dynamic: (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 8.

tivity to God's initiative can be achieved.

CHAPTER V

PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS

The traces of the ox are now apparent. Out of the maze of ideas of theologians and psychologists, and even mathematicians, my own ideas emerge. Remember, I am biased. I doubt that my view is the way it is. My conclusions seem mind-blowing to me. They seem to be based both on experience and logic. They seem to have both personal and social implications. They seem to hold immense possibilities for both Christians and Hindus, indeed, for all people who are struggling with the search for the self.

I believe now that the self is infinite. Each self is unique and remains so. Each self has limitations based upon its uniqueness, yet there is no limit to its potential for growth or for its awareness and expression of its infinite possibilities.

God is infinite and of a different quality than the many selves, human or otherwise.

The relationship between self and God is one of union and relationship out of differentness. All that the self is, is of God. Yet, the self is not God, for much that is of God is not in the self of each person. In theological terms, one could say God is both fully immanent and transcendent. The self never disappears, for

the uniqueness that makes up the self is always retained. This awareness of union with God makes possible humbleness, for one sees he is so limited. It makes possible, too, restless need for growth, for much more is awaiting expression through the self.

I recognize the goodness of the self ("ontological") and the tendencies toward selfishness ("ethical"). With my eyes, I see most of us need to feel that we are fundamentally O.K. We lack both an awareness of our divinity and an awareness of our selfishness. We need to be enlightened about BOTH. That means we need encouragement to let ourselves express without fear, and we need confrontation to help us to alter our self-centeredness.

I believe that urging a person to believe he is perfect can be harmful, for the fact is, he is not. Trying to be perfect and failing can lead to horrible feelings of inadequacy and a shriveling up of the positive factors that are present. Feeling one is perfect can lead to domination of others and a lack of growth within oneself.

However, I believe that urging a person to believe he is evil is also harmful. It can also cause one to give up or to become confused and move into a false piety.

My personal goals are: to feel quite intensely my OKness as a unique person, to become aware of my limitations and recognize those are the defining limits of my uniqueness, to become aware of my infinite possibilities

and use them for the greater good of all, to encourage myself and allow others to encourage me to be who I am, to confront myself and be willing to be confronted by others when my selfishness is apparent, to become aware of my unity with God and permit that union to express through my life. I hope, too, that I will be able to help some others to accept and to challenge themselves, to feel their infinite possibilities within their unique defining limits, and to feel a unity and/or communion with God.

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